

Levy visit

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak will meet with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Alexandria on Sunday. The one-day trip is the foreign minister's first official visit to Egypt since taking office last June, and comes after a series of lower-level contacts this week in Paris between Mubarak's political adviser, Osama El-Baz, Netanyahu's top foreign policy adviser, Dore Gold, and Denis Ross, the US special representative to the Middle East peace talks.

Syrian track

SYRIAN President Hafez Al-Assad met with US Senator Arlen Specter, head of the Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee, in Damascus yesterday, amid moves to reactivate Syrian-Israeli peace talks. Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa and the US ambassador to Syria also attended. Specter earlier met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy, but Netanyahu's office declined to confirm an Israeli radio report that Specter was carrying a message from Netanyahu on the resumption of peace talks.

According to an adviser, Netanyahu is insisting on resuming talks without preconditions, but has not ruled out territorial compromise in the Golan Heights. Al-Sharaa said in talks in Paris on Tuesday that Syria was willing to return to the negotiating table to discuss the land-for-peace formula and to pick up the talks where they left off last February.

Second deal

TURKEY and Israel signed another accord on defence technology cooperation yesterday. The deal is the second move this year towards stepping up Turkish-Israeli cooperation in the military field. Signed in Ankara by the director-general of Israel's Defence Ministry, David Levy, and Turkey's under-secretary at the Defence Ministry, Tuncer Kiliç, the agreement covers the exchange of technical know-how. It is likely to pave the way for a long-delayed deal worth \$650 million for the Israeli overhaul of 54 Turkish F-4 Phantom jets.

An earlier military agreement, signed in February, allowed Israeli jets to train in Turkish airspace. It provoked protest from Arab countries. Turkey's Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, at the time in opposition, also criticised it.

MP in prison

A MEMBER of parliament belonging to the ruling National Democratic Party was sentenced by the Supreme Military Court on Tuesday to six months imprisonment with hard labour for evading conscription into the military.

Reda Abdel-Rahman, an MP for Toukh in the Qalyubiya governorate, was accused of submitting counterfeit certificates exempting him from military service. Abdel-Rahman, 51, was sentenced for the crime of draft-dodging, a charge that has no statute of limitations. However, the forgery charges were dropped because the statute of limitations had elapsed.

Before the trial, Abdel-Rahman was stripped of his immunity. By-elections for his seat are expected once parliament reconvenes in October.

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Mubarak warns again

MENA's fate hangs in the balance. Nevine Khalil reports from Alexandria

President Hosni Mubarak said yesterday that progress toward a comprehensive peace in the Middle East was a "necessary and logical" prelude for the success of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) economic cooperation summit, scheduled to meet in Cairo in November.

Mubarak said the chances of the summit's success would be limited, and some parties might stay away, unless "serious steps are taken toward a just peace in the region."

Mubarak, who spoke to Alexandria University professors, was answering a question about a statement which he made a week ago, drawing attention to the obstacles which the November summit might encounter if the peace process remained stalemated.

Mubarak hinted last Thursday that if Israel continued to filter on the peace process, the economic cooperation summit might be cancelled. The remark threw Israeli diplomacy into a frenzy of action, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu telephoning Mubarak short-

ly afterwards to assure him that progress on the ground would be made soon.

Mubarak said he was sending a message to all concerned parties, stressing the importance of continued commitment to peace and the previously-concluded agreements, particularly on the Palestinian track, in order to ensure the summit's success.

Mubarak expressed hope that positive movement in the direction of peace would be made in the near future, describing it as "the best security guarantee and a logical prelude for the success of economic cooperation."

Answering another question about a conference of Muslim fundamentalists scheduled to open in London early in September, Mubarak expressed surprise that such a conference would be held to bring together the many "advocates of terrorism". "This will not serve the cause of fighting international terrorism," Mubarak said. "Many questions are being raised about this conference and we hope that the coming days will provide answers." (see p. 2)

Arafat issues strike call

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat yesterday described as a "declaration of war" Israeli moves to expand Jewish settlements and urged Palestinians throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories to stage a general strike in protest.

"The settlement activity is a violation and a crime by the new Israeli leadership and represents a declaration of war against the Palestinian nation," Arafat told a meeting in Ramallah of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other Palestinian political bodies.

"We ask the council to call a 24-hour general strike tomorrow [today] from Rafah to Jenin," he said, referring to the southernmost and northernmost towns under the control of his Palestinian self-rule government.

Arafat urged Israel's Arab citizens to join the protest and called on all Palestinians "to go pray in Jerusalem" on Friday in a further act of defiance against the policies of the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The council agreed to call a strike but only for four hours between 8am and midday.

It was the first time Arafat has called such a protest strike since the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords which launched limited self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. His outburst came a day after Israel announced it would build 1,800 new homes in an ultra-Orthodox settlement in the West Bank, the first such expansion of the settlements since 1992.

"We cannot remain silent or passive in the face of this Israeli insistence on implementing their [settlement] plan," Arafat said, calling on the gathered Palestinian leaders to make combating settlement expansion "our top priority."

Arafat interrupted his speech to speak by telephone with Dennis Ross, the US coordinator for the Middle East peace process, who has been meeting in Paris with Netanyahu's top policy

adviser, Dore Gold, and Egypt's presidential political adviser Osama El-Baz.

Back at the podium, Arafat said Ross had proposed that Gold and Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat's deputy in the Palestinian Authority, meet today to discuss the settlement crisis and other issues. Arafat did not say if he had agreed to the meeting.

"Dennis told me that the talks were very important and there should be a meeting tomorrow [today] between Dore Gold and Abu Mazen," Arafat said.

He quoted Ross as telling him: "The important thing is the Israelis are prepared to move." Arafat said he replied: "Is this like their previous promises?"

"No, they have good intentions," Arafat quoted Ross as saying.

Returning to his speech, Arafat said that the previous Labour government in Israel, which signed the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords granting limited autonomy to the Palestinians, had pledged "not to add even one more house to any settlement."

"Everything that is taking place now is a flagrant violation of the agreements between us," Arafat said.

Palestinian leaders were also angered by Netanyahu's moves to close down Palestinian institutions in disputed East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian Authority reluctantly closed down three affiliated offices in the city over the weekend after Netanyahu threatened to freeze the peace process unless they were shut. And on Tuesday, Israeli authorities demolished a Palestinian community centre under construction in the Arab quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Police followed up the action yesterday by dismantling a group of tents which local residents had erected on the same site.

Concern over London meeting

A conference of Islamist militants will be held in London early September despite Egyptian protests. Amr Abdel-Samie, in the British capital, and Jallan Halawi, in Cairo, report

Egypt has publicised its fears that a conference of Islamists opening in London next month would amount to a gathering of "terrorists" plotting to overthrow the legitimate governments of several Arab and Islamic states. But British officials argue that the conference cannot be stopped as long as British law has not been violated by any of the participants.

About 14,000 Islamist hardliners are expected to take part in the "International Conference Rally for Revival", which is organised by Omar Bakri's newly-established Al-Muhajiroun (emigrants) group, a splinter faction of the Islamic Liberation Party. The party was led by Bakri, a 35-year-old man of Syrian origin, before he broke ranks last January to establish Al-Muhajiroun.

Richard Macepeace, deputy head of the British mission in Cairo, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday by Nihad Abdel-Latif, assistant to the foreign minister, who expressed the Egyptian government's concern about the conference and requested additional information, a spokesman for the British Embassy said.

Macepeace assured Abdel-Latif that this was a privately organised conference with which the British government had nothing to do. The spokesman said Macepeace called at the Foreign Ministry again yesterday to provide the requested information. However, the spokesman refused to divulge its nature, describing it only as "background information."

The Islamic Liberation Party had organised its own annual rally last Saturday at Earl's Court in London under the title "Islam and Israel's occupation of Palestine."

About 1,000 people who showed up for the

conference heard speeches lambasting the United States for its policy of supporting Israel.

The forthcoming conference of Al-Muhajiroun is expected to hear videotaped speeches by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian millionaire believed to be the financier of militant groups, and Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, leader of the Egyptian Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya. The latter was convicted earlier this year by an American court for conspiracy to blow up New York landmarks and sentenced to life in prison.

Those likely to attend in person may include Adel Tawfik Serri of Egypt's Jihad organisation, who had been sentenced to death in absentia for a failed attempt in 1993 on the life of former Prime Minister Atef Sidki. Serri, an Egyptian, had been granted political asylum in Britain.

Another is Abdel-Meguid Abdel-Bari, also of the Jihad organisation, convicted in a failed attempt to bomb Khan El-Khalili, Cairo's largest tourist bazaar. Abdel-Bari who is suspected of spearheading other attempts to bomb tourist sites, was also granted political asylum in Britain.

"The London conference is likely to turn into a forum for organising extremist activity against Arab governments in the name of Islam," said a top Egyptian security official who asked to remain anonymous.

The timing of the conference, the official added, could not be worse because it is taking place "at a time when an international anti-terrorism campaign is being launched under the leadership of the United States."

And yet, militant activity is on the rise in Britain, the official said, noting that, in exile, the radicals have set up media centres that issue bulletins against the governments

of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Syria. "Some European countries have replaced Pakistan and Afghanistan as the alternative refuge of Egyptian and Arab terrorists," the official said.

He argued that tolerating this conference by Britain ran counter to Prime Minister John Major's position that militants should be denied haven from which they can carry out or plan their terrorist activities. "And yet, Britain continues to grant political asylum to some terrorist leaders, providing them with a safe haven for planning, gathering information and executing their destructive acts against some governments," the official said.

British officials, for their part, while making it clear that there is no love lost between them and the militants, stress that no British government can step over Britain's democratic laws.

"These persons are kept under close surveillance to make sure that they are not involved in any political or terrorist activity," a British official said. "And yet Britain is ready to act against them if the concerned governments provide material evidence that they have been involved in such activities on British soil."

British officials also say that Britain has not provided the Islamist opposition alone with refuge but also opposition groups from across the world, stretching from Peru to Sri Lanka.

Egyptian officials, obviously unconvinced, argue that it may be true that the Muslim residents of Britain cannot be barred from attending such a conference, but why should Britain grant entry visas to "well-known terrorists" for the purpose of taking part?



Words from the heart

THE FUNERAL of Ahmed Bahaeddin, who died this week aged 69, brought ministers, ambassadors, intellectuals, artists and ordinary people to Omar Makram Mosque on Monday to pay their last respects to one of the towering figures of Egyptian journalism, reports Khaled Dawoud.

President Hosni Mubarak was represented by a personal envoy at the funeral, which brought together representatives from across the political spectrum intent on ignoring their differences to unite in memory of the late Bahaeddin whose writings, for over four decades, expressed "the conscience of the nation".

Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, a close friend of Bahaeddin throughout his long career and the ups and downs of Egyptian politics, was among the first to arrive at the mosque. He took his place alongside Arab ambassadors, who had come to salute Bahaeddin's staunch pan-Arabist stands, cabinet members Amr Moussa, minister of foreign affairs, Ismail Salam, minister of health, Farouk Hosni, minister of culture, Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, minister of education, and Zakaria Azmi, director of the President's Office Ibrahim Badie, chairman of the Press Syndicate and head of the Arab Journalists' Union,

was in Damascus at the time of the funeral and therefore could not attend.

"Ahmed Bahaeddin meant a lot, as a writer, as one of the foremost thinkers of Egypt and the Arab world. He was a great man, and his loss, therefore, is greatly felt," said Amr Moussa. "Commenting on history is a very difficult task. And now Bahaeddin is himself a part of history," said the Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni. "But he will not be forgotten, and the principles for which he fought will always be with us."

Astor Adel Inam and the film directors Youssef Chahine and Atef Salem were among the many figures drawn from the world of the arts and entertainment who sat among the crowds at the funeral. Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tugamu Party, whom Bahaeddin supported openly in the 1990 election campaign, was among the scores of leftist figures who thronged the mosque in a spontaneous show of affection for a man who, by virtue of his pen, had entered people's hearts.

Above: Ahmed Bahaeddin, painted by the celebrated portraitist Sabry Ragheb, from the collection of Al-Ahram.

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High waters

AN UNPRECEDENTED rise in Lake Nasser's water level promises to keep Egypt self-sufficient for the next seven years, but threatens to cause serious flooding in Sudan.

"This year's flood will be higher than that of any previous year, and will bring in not less than 100 billion cubic metres of water," said Minister for Public Works and Water Resources Abdel-Hadi Radi at a press conference on Tuesday. The lake's water level rose to 175 metres this week, the highest level reached since the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1970. By October, the

water level is expected to reach almost 180 metres, and the excess water will be drained through the Toshki spillway which lies west of the lake.

According to Radi, while the flooding in Sudan will be "dangerous", it will not affect Egypt since the excess four billion cubic metres of water will be channelled off and used in irrigating agricultural lands.

He added that Egypt is willing to assist Sudan in combating the floods if Khartoum asks for help.

Cairo sounds a warning bell

President Hosni Mubarak sent a warning to Israel last Thursday: If progress is not made in the peace process, the regional economic summit scheduled for next November in Cairo might be cancelled. The warning appears to have sent tremors reverberating across the border to the Israeli government. In effect, Mubarak threatened to dash Israel's hopes that closer forms of regional economic cooperation would be forged soon — a primary target, from the Israeli perspective, of the peace effort.

Addressing over 2,000 university students and professors in Alexandria, Mubarak said that "if progress is not made in the peace process and signed agreements are not implemented, the consequences will be colossal." He pressed the issue further: "How can the Palestinians wait any longer, and how can the economic conference be held if Israel does not agree to a revival of the peace process? If the status quo continues, it will affect the conference and many states in the region will not attend," Mubarak warned.

The Egyptian president's threat brought a quick reaction from Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reportedly shaken by Mubarak's tone, telephoned the president soon after the speech and assured him that talks with the Palestinians would resume "in the very near future." The Israeli media announced later that Netanyahu would be meeting soon with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Despite Netanyahu's earlier assertion that he would hold talks with Arafat only when he deemed it necessary for Israel's security, the Israeli press reported that the two are expected to meet before Netanyahu's visit to the US, scheduled for 10 September.

Israel has signalled its readiness to activate the stalled peace process, fearing that its foot-dragging might dash prospects for a regional economic summit in November.

Nevine Khalil and Doaa El-Bey review the latest developments in the Middle East tug-of-war

But as of Tuesday, Arafat had yet to receive an official invitation for a meeting with Netanyahu. Earlier in the week, the Israeli prime minister told Israeli television that the Palestinian track was "starting to move; it is simply moving differently."

Israeli President Ezer Weizman also said he would meet with Arafat within the coming fortnight. With Netanyahu at his side, Weizman told a press conference on Monday that he would respond to a "distress" letter sent to him by Arafat and invite him to his home.

On the same day, Netanyahu dispatched his senior political aide, Dore Gold, to Paris to hold talks with President Mubarak's top political adviser Osama El-Baz and US peace coordinator Dennis Ross. And Cairo will be receiving Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Sunday for "honest and quick" discussions of the situation at hand, especially Israel's position on the peace process and the November economic summit.



Amr Moussa



Osama El-Baz



David Levy

"We are looking forward to this visit as we have a lot of issues which we need to discuss," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said. "We also want to affirm that we, as Arabs, are committed to the peace option."

In Paris on Tuesday, Egyptian and Israeli officials discussed ways of reviving the stalled process and preparations for the regional economic summit, the third of its kind after Casablanca and Amman. "This is still very preliminary," stressed El-Baz after a meeting with Gold, while Gold described the same meeting as "very good," adding: "I think we are deepening the understanding between the different countries." The two met with Ross later in the day.

But despite these overtures, Israel continued to send out confusing signals. It announced on Tuesday that 1,800 new homes would be built in the West Bank. In a clear violation of the new government's verbal commitment to peace, and Netanyahu's phone conversation with Mubarak, Israel authorised the immediate construction of 900 apartments near Ramallah.

The move is the first attempt to increase the population of the settlements since Netanyahu lifted a freeze earlier this month on settlement building in the Occupied Territories imposed by the previous government.

As Egypt pressed its efforts to revive the peace process, Moussa travelled to Damascus on Tuesday to deliver a message from Mubarak to Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad.

Moussa said that Cairo is demanding that Israel "clearly and quickly" proceed on all tracks in line with the decisions and agreements made in the past. Egypt would not acknowledge superficial manoeuvres in the media, "but only serious and real moves implementing what has been agreed upon."

Moussa reiterated Mubarak's doubts regarding "regional activities" connected to the process.

"What the president announced [concerning the summit] is clear and precise," Moussa said, "and represents the official and factual Egyptian position."

Moussa said that Mubarak had announced a grace period for the new Israeli government shortly after Netanyahu's election in May, "but up till now, Israeli policy has not budged."

During the Cairo Arab Summit last June, Arab leaders affirmed that if Israel "deviates from the bases or principles of the peace process, or retreats from its commitments and agreements or procrastinates in implementing them, [it] will bear sole and full responsibility for this situation."

The Arab League, in turn, threw its weight behind Mubarak. Arab League Spokesman Talaat Hamed reaffirmed the link between holding the economic summit and progress in the peace process.

Hamed told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Arab League Secretary-General Essam Abdel-Meguid was emphasising that "the desired regional cooperation is strongly linked to resolving all the political problems related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue." It was not possible to discuss a Middle East market or signing joint projects at a time when Israel continues to occupy Arab land, he added.

Hamed said the general secretary of the Arab League regarded Mubarak's warnings as a clear message to Israel that it must take positive steps to show respect for the peace accords signed earlier, especially the land-for-peace formula. "If Israel sticks to its intransigent stand, the incentives for cancelling the summit will outweigh those for holding it," he said.

Jars contain mummies' secrets

An X-ray analysis of four canopic jars found in a nobleman's tomb at Dahshour, 30km south of Giza, has proved that they contained material used by the ancients for mummification. The jars were found this week by workers doing routine excavation work on the tomb which dates back to the Middle Kingdom. Egyptologists believe the find may bring them closer to unravelling the secrets of the religious ritual which the Ancient Egyptian clergy had kept under close wraps.

According to Nasri Iskandar, a forensic pathologist specialising in the dissection of mummies, the jars were brought last Monday to an antiquities laboratory in the Egyptian Museum where they underwent X-ray and ultraviolet-ray tests. "These tests, in which a X-ray diffractometer was used, proved that three jars contained the remains of material used for mummification, such as natron, sodium chloride, potassium and other chemicals. The remains of internal organs made up the contents of the fourth," he said.

Iskandar said, however, that this was not the first time that material used for mummification had been recovered. In 1947, some canopic jars were found in a tomb in Saqqara. They contained the remains of internal body organs mixed with material used in mummification, he said.

This discovery did not provide complete information on all the materi-

An archaeological find at Dahshour may bring Egyptologists a step closer to unravelling the secrets of mummification. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

als used in the ancient ritual but it encouraged a group of Egyptologists to test the formula that became known then on dead animals. A duck which they mummified, using the available information, is on display at the Egyptian Museum, Iskandar said.

"The latest discovery, by yielding fresh information, will complete the circle first charted in 1947. Hopefully, the full details of the mummification process will become known to us," he said.

According to archaeologist Zahi Hawass, head of the Giza Plateau, mummification was a religious ritual conducted by Ancient Egyptian priests who kept the secrets of the entire process closely guarded. "These secrets were known only to them. This explains why no papyrus or inscriptions were left behind, explaining the formula used in mummification. The priests insisted on secrecy presumably because the process was

rewarding to them in terms of profit and social prestige," Hawass said. Abdel-Halim Nouruddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said mummification techniques were perfected by the ancients in the Middle Kingdom, particularly during the period spanning the 17th to the 21st dynasties. "Before then, the techniques were primitive and after, in the New Kingdom, the techniques took a downward curve, with the priests paying greater attention to the outer appearance of the mummy, by wrapping it in fine cloth, for example," he said. "This explains why some mummies dating back to the New Kingdom are in bad condition while Middle Kingdom mummies are usually in good shape."

Peter Arnold, head of the Metropolitan Museum mission which is carrying out the excavation at Dahshour, said the mummification material which has been recovered will help unravel some of the secrets of the process. In cooperation with the University of Maryland, this formula will be tested on a dead human body which will be mummified in the same way used by the Ancient Egyptians.

Since the burial chamber of the nobleman's tomb remains to be opened, Arnold expects more finds once the new season begins in September.

Tighter security for banks

Following two armed robberies blamed on Islamic militants, security is to be tightened at banks and restrictions on gun ownership are reported to have been relaxed. **Jailan Halawati** investigates

Tighter security measures are to be enforced for the protection of banks — the latest target of Islamist militants apparently bent on replenishing their coffers. The decision was taken last week at a meeting between Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi and representatives of foreign and local banks, headed by National Bank of Egypt president Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz.

According to Abdel-Aziz, the question of security assumed new urgency after armed militants held up a branch of Mir Bank at Al-Ayyat in Giza on 5 August, killing one person and wounding three and fleeing with more than LE500,000 in cash. "The attack on Mir Bank revealed our deficiency," Abdel-Aziz said. "We need to update our security apparatus. We need a proper connection with the Interior Ministry, and additional security inside and outside the banks."

Following a second robbery on 17 August, in

which the militants raided three jewellery stores at Tahta in Sobag Governorate, 460km south of Cairo, it was reported in the Arabic-language press that the Interior Ministry had decided to relax restrictions on licensing weapons for civilians. After killing two Coptic jewellers and wounding three other people, the militants escaped in a hijacked truck with 15kg of gold, worth LE600,000, and LE15,000 in cash.

Sources at the Interior Ministry said the militants had apparently turned to robbery after the government succeeded in cutting off their funding from abroad.

According to Maj Gen Mustafa Abdel-Qader, assistant to the interior minister, the new plan calls for banks to hire security guards trained and armed by the Interior Ministry as part of a nationwide effort to "protect investment in Egypt and bolster the economy." The type of weapons to be used by these guards were under consideration, along with addi-

tional security measures including setting up a security grid to connect banks with police stations and the Interior Ministry, Abdel-Qader said. According to Abdel-Aziz, responsibility for financing the security firm would rest with the various banks and insurance companies.

"It is about time that the economic institutions take into consideration the importance of using high-tech methods to make their offices secure," Abdel-Qader said. "Security is an expensive product, directly linked with development and investment."

The new security measures will begin at the bank's entrance. "Sophisticated metal detectors will be installed at the gates of every bank, and there will be monitors on each floor," said Abdel-Qader. "Highly-trained, plainclothed guards will be deployed inside and outside the banks."

Provincial branches will also be provided with plainclothed guards as well as police escorts for their

cash-transporting vehicles. According to Abdel-Qader, "These banks made themselves an easy target to terrorists by transporting large amounts of money on unguarded motorcycles." He added that "for greater security, dealings in cash should be replaced by the use of credit cards."

Abdel-Qader denied the reports that restrictions on the private ownership of guns, imposed before parliamentary elections at the end of last year, were to be lifted. Many weapons' licences have been revoked under these restrictions.

The Interior Ministry had only acted to "rationalise" the ownership of personal weapons, he said, adding that the restrictions applied only to automatic weapons, whose possession should be confined to security men. "Pistols are the only weapons allowed in self-defence and licences for their ownership continue to be issued."

FGM claims another life

A 14-year-old schoolgirl died in the governorate of Qalyubiya, just north of Cairo, earlier this week after she was subjected to a female genital mutilation (FGM), at her father's request, by a licensed doctor. The death of Amina Abdel-Hamid, for which the doctor denied responsibility, was seized upon by human rights activists to show that FGM, popularly known as female circumcision, continues to be widely practised despite a ban clamped by Health Minister Ismail Sallam.

The doctor, Rabie Ibrahim Mahgoub, was arrested and then released on LE500 bail. Putting the blame on the girl's father, the doctor said that he should have been informed before the surgery that the girl suffered from a heart condition. The father did not inform him and, as a result, the doctor said he injected the girl with a tranquilliser that might have caused her heart to fail.

The versions of the incident provided by the doctor and the father were at variance. The doctor claimed the operation was performed at a small local hospital, while the father insisted it took place at his house. The father told police that the girl did not regain consciousness after the operation and that he sought the doctor's advice twice. The doctor said that when he left the girl, after the operation, she was in a "normal" condition. The girl's death came less than a month after Sallam issued a decree banning all members of the medical profession from performing the surgery.

Sallam, as well as his senior aides, declined comment on the tragedy. "I am busy. I do not have time to talk on the phone," said Dr Mushira El-Shafie, director of the ministry's Reproductive Health and Family Planning Department.

During the past month, members of the Female Genital Mutilation Combat Task Force — a non-governmental organisation (NGO) — and the women's committee of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) repeatedly complained that the ministerial ban was largely ig-

Human rights activists charge that female genital mutilation, which claimed the life of a teenage schoolgirl this week, continues to be widely practised despite a ministerial ban. **Dina Ezzat** reports

nored by doctors and hospitals alike. They claimed that dozens of girls were subjected to the operation for the removal of their clitoris and sometimes the rest of their external reproductive organs. Feminists and human rights activists warned that since the practice is a source of income for doctors and nurses, the ministry has to keep them under close watch to guarantee compliance.

The ministry insisted, however, that the ban is generally observed. "Any doctor who does not abide by a ministerial decree could face legal action by the ministry," said Ismail Seddik, legal adviser to the minister of health.

The decree was issued a few days after Sara, an 11-year-old, died of internal bleeding at a Cairo hospital to which she was rushed after a village barber botched an operation for the mutilation of her genitals.

"Despite the decree, the operation is still performed publicly and shamelessly in and out of public hospitals. The latest death was only inevitable," said Maha Attiya of the EOHR.

Some members of the medical profession did not conceal their opposition to the ministerial ban, sending a letter of protest to Sallam. The letter was signed by 40 doctors from various parts of Upper Egypt. They said compliance with the ban was not warranted because it violated the spirit of *Shari'a* which, they claimed, stipulated that FGM is a "must" for all Muslim women.

The ministry ignored the protest. "We are not going to be intimidated by this attitude," said El-Shafie, a few days before Amina's death. The head of the ministry's Reproductive Health Department added: "When we (the ministry) took the decision to combat the practice, we anticipated that there would be some sort of resistance. But again this is not going to chill our enthusiasm because we know we are doing the right thing and we are prepared to go through the battle."

Acting separately from the Upper Egypt doctors, gynaecologist Mounir Fawzi filed a lawsuit against Sallam for imposing the ban. "The practice is good for the woman and it is ordained by Islam," Fawzi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "If the parts that we circumcise are left uncut, the women would not be clean and would suffer from an undesirable [high] sexual urge."

Although many Muslim clergymen, led by the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, believe that FGM is not mandated by Islam, Fawzi insists that only those who link the ritual to Islam know what they are talking about. "As a Muslim, I am entitled to embrace the opinion that I believe to be sound and, as a doctor, I believe that banning the practice will force it to go underground and endanger the lives of many girls who will be denied the professional care of a doctor," he said.

The lawsuit will be considered by an administrative court, but no date has been set yet for the start of hearings. "Once hearings begin, other doctors, university professors and civil servants who share my view will join in against the minister of health," Fawzi said.

The practice, to which an estimated 3,600 girls are subjected every day, had been briefly condoned at government-run hospitals by the outgoing minister of health, Ali Abdel-Fattah. Under NGO pressure, Abdel-Fattah reversed his own decision shortly before he was replaced by Sallam in a cabinet change last January.

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Liberal critic welcomed as censor

Ali Abu Shadi, a cinema critic known for his liberal views and broad-mindedness, was appointed last week by Culture Minister Farouk Hosni to head the Censorship Board of Artists' Works, a post which has been vacant since April. Entertainers, whose relations with former chief censor Doreya Sharafeeddin appear to have been strained, urged Abu Shadi to show greater understanding in dealing with them. The new chief censor responded by promising to pursue a liberal policy.

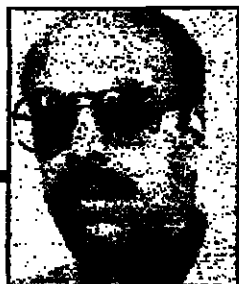
Before his appointment, Abu Shadi held a high position in the General Authority for Cultural Palaces, an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture. Abu Shadi is also the author of several books such as *Classics of the Arab Cinema* and *Studies of Documentary Films*.

Last Thursday was Abu Shadi's first day on the new job. He met with his top aides to define a new policy for the censorship board. "Upgrading the board's performance will be given priority," Abu Shadi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "A grade system will be introduced for evaluating the work of censors and promoting the promising ones."

Greater freedom of expression will be allowed, he said. Objective political criticism will be tolerated and works which do not violate the rules of decency will not be "blue-pencilled."

Abu Shadi defended the existence of a censorship board as a necessity "in the current circumstances. If we manage to broaden the limited margin of freedom allowed to us, then

Entertainers breathed a sigh of relief after a liberal cinema critic was appointed chief censor. Mona El-Nahas reports



there will be no need for such a board," he said.

Stage director Samir El-Asfour said the concept of censorship should change. "Censorship should serve art instead of acting as an obstacle in its way," he said.

El-Asfour urged Abu Shadi to be wary of his assistants. "If he listens to their nonsense, they may push him towards a direct confrontation with intellectuals as they did with the former censor," he said.

Cinema actress Leila Elwi said the majority of entertainers were fed up with the narrow-mindedness of censors. "We need greater freedom and I hope that Abu Shadi will be our liberator," she said.

The post of chief censor has been vacant since Sharafeeddin submitted his resignation in April, triggering a controversy on the pages of the Arabic-language press. Sharafeeddin said at the time she decided to quit to protest the continuous interference of her seniors in her work. Sources at the Ministry of Culture counter-charged that Sharafeeddin often went over the head of her superiors. They described some of

her decisions as "stubborn and harsh." One source claimed she withdrew after fearing she would be dismissed.

Entertainers felt that many of Sharafeeddin's decisions were purposely directed against them. One of those decisions was to prohibit bellydancing in theatrical performances. The decision, which Sharafeeddin failed to enforce, came under criticism because it was vague and had too many loopholes.

Another decision, which took effect for barely three days, was to ban *Dastour Ya Aswadna*, a comedy satirising the constitutional rights of citizens, on the grounds that the actors did not stick to the script approved by the censorship in advance.

"The ban was clamped out of the blue after the play had been running successfully for a whole month," said author Mahmoud El-Toukhi. "It was lifted three days afterwards under pressure from the majority of theatre and cinema workers."

El-Toukhi expressed the hope that Abu Shadi would bring about a radical change in the censorship's role, showing greater respect for creativity and freedom of expression. El-Toukhi said he also hoped that the liberalism of Abu Shadi, whom he praised as a "cultured and courageous" critic, would not suffer as a result of the constraints of the new post.

Script writer Rafiq El-Sabban, a strong opponent of censorship, was similarly optimistic about the choice of Abu Shadi. "Censorship, a reflection of the social conscience, should act to encourage creativity. Consequently, censors should show flexibility and understanding in approaching works of art. I'm sure that Abu Shadi, who is familiar with our needs, is capable of doing this."

The appointment of the new censor took about four months and sources at the Supreme Council for Culture attributed the delay to a meticulous search for the right person. During that period, the council's chairman, Gaber Asfour, provisionally assumed the chief censor's responsibilities.

The Censorship Board was established in 1914 to examine works of art and cut out parts which may threaten the security of the state. It was supervised by security bodies until 1952 when it became an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture. A new law in 1955 defined the role of censorship as protecting moral and religious values as well as state interests. Almost 40 years later amendments were introduced, stiffening penalties against censorship offenses.

The right to a fair trial

Awad El-Morr, Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, examines the safeguards necessary to ensure a fair trial



In Case No 13 for the 12th judicial year, decided on the 2 February, 1996 the Court entered for the first time into a new arena in which the right to a fair trial and its constituent elements were thoroughly examined and outlined.

In this case the office of the public prosecutor indicted the petitioner upon allegations that he knowingly possessed and dealt with smuggled foreign commodities.

Under paragraph two of Article 121 of Law No 66 (1963) concerning custom duties — the violation of which represented one of the counts with which the accused was charged — contraband shall be deemed as the possession of foreign commodities with the intention of trading knowing that the commodities had been paid in full.

In challenging the validity of this paragraph before the Court of Cassation, the petitioner based his argument on the premise that the provision in question established a legal presumption by which the non-submission of specific documents was taken as a substitute for a criminal intent in contradiction with the assumption of innocence and the requirements of a fair trial.

In deciding the case, the court invalidated the challenged provision, arguing:

- that the Constitution is the paramount law of the land which demarcates the constituent elements of the regime of governance, as well as basic freedoms and rights. Competence attributed to the legislature thereby, confines its main powers to the adoption of legislation and not to invade or supersede the powers to which other branches of the government are entitled.

- that the right to a fair trial proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is also enshrined and protected by Article 67 of the Constitution which extends that guarantee to all controversies irrespective of the nature of the subject-matter involved therein, thus reiterating a norm that has been applied in democratic countries as a systematic and determinative pattern for conduct.

- within that norm, the Court observed, certain fundamental guarantees fall which ensure an integrated concept of justice, mirroring civilised contemporary standards. While this concept raises questions as to the formation of the respective court adjudicating the subject matter under its consideration, its substantive and procedural rules, and the manner of their application, light ought to be shed in particular on criminal accusations because of their direct linkage with personal freedom qualified by the Constitution as a natural right.

- a criminal conviction, the court went on, carries with it the most serious restrictions and even threatens the right to life and thus demands a due balance between the individual's right to liberty on the one hand and the defence of society's interests on the other. As a corollary to this balance, and in consequence of the adversarial system of criminal justice, an indictment must clearly define the respective charge and all other elements attached thereto, including the nature of the offence and its related evidence.

- that due account ought to be given to the requirement that the trial court, acting as an independent and impartial body, should master its proceedings without undue delay and conduct fairly the necessary investigations in order to arrive at a rational determination of the question of guilt or innocence in the light of all mitigating factors and aggravating circumstances, without prejudice either to the presumption of innocence or to the right to counsel, both of which are articulated and specified by the constitution in articles 67 and 69 respectively.

- that innocence is more properly called an assumption as opposed to a presumption. It does not, the court pointed out, rest on any other proved facts, but is assumed. In addition, the presumption of innocence, being connected with the proof of guilt, and dissociated from the prescribed kinds of punishment, lies at the heart of all criminal proceedings and dominates the trial in all its phases and throughout the proper administration of criminal justice. Understood in this sense, all individuals, whether suspects or accused, are beneficiaries thereof and, unless clearly rebutted by irrefutable evidence at which the court arrives, the presumption stands unchallenged. The presumption of innocence, a crystal-clear, undisputed norm and a prerequisite exacted by the Constitution against arbitrariness and prejudice, is not intended to provide a shield for the accused, but to secure acquittal whenever a criminal charge has not been proven beyond reasonable doubt.

- that what matters in the protection of human rights and freedoms is the preservation of their core and practical outcome, with the consequence that tangible safeguards in the process of a fair trial shall restrain intolerable acts directed against personal freedom without the due process of law, and provide the accused with the required sanctuary for his security.

- that the fair trial is an integrated system viewing human dignity as one of its main goals, suppressing unjustified encroachments thereon, and defining all deviations from the purposes and methods of criminal law as determined by social values of a given society at a given time.

- that the sanctity of private life and the severity of restrictions affecting personal security have led civilised countries to restrain the authority to inflict pain, taking into account that the conviction of the accused at whatever cost and by whatever means runs contrary to the effective administration of justice. Indeed the recognition of a minimum standard of rights attributable to the accused in the course of his trial figures out inalienable values, which may be neither dispensed with nor conceded. Such rights, even of procedural nature, do have a substantial effect on the outcome of trial.

- that contraband is an intentional crime in respect of which all the constituent elements thereof must be materially established before, and ascertained by, the trial court. Therefore, a legally assumed element of this crime, implies the legislature's implication in matters constitutionally attributed to the judicial branch, in violation of the principle of the separation of powers. Initially, the criminal intent of contraband has to be proven beyond all reasonable doubt just as much as other elements of that crime.

However, under the challenged provision, that intent was indirectly established by a legal, enforceable presumption which clearly states that whenever the possessor of foreign commodities for trade fails to produce documents proving the payment of duties, his knowledge that these commodities have been smuggled is presumed.

In order to protect the vital domain of personal liberty, and to ensure the effectiveness of the presumption of innocence in all criminal prosecutions, the accused must benefit from certain compulsory procedural safeguards, including the right to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to obtain witnesses in his favour, and to have the assistance of a counsel. In defiance of all these rights, the aforesaid legal presumption prescribed by the challenged provision has been arbitrarily tailored to waive the presumption of innocence, thus releasing the district attorney of his obligation to clearly prove the mental element (*mens rea*) of the crime of smuggled merchandise; evading the requirements of a fair trial; abridging the right to counsel; and finally intruding upon competencies allocated to and assigned for the different branches of government, in violation of articles 41, 67, 69, 86 and 165 of the Constitution.



Abul-Ela's new location still unknown

photo: Antoine Albert

Whither Abul-Ela?

In the latest about-turn in decision-making over the future of Abul-Ela Bridge, the government has decided to move the aging construction to a new location. But a new site has yet to be decided on, reports Gihan Shahine

After years of hesitation over the future of Abul-Ela Bridge, the government has made up its mind — and officials say that this time the decision is final. The 4,000-ton bridge, connecting the exclusive Nile island of Zamalek with the working-class neighbourhood of Boulaq, is to be taken out of service for safety reasons.

The bridge, opened in 1912, will be dismantled and moved to a new location, where it will be re-assembled, officials say. But no decision has yet been taken on the new site, raising fears that after dismantling, the bridge will never be re-assembled, and might even end up in the hands of scrap dealers.

The decision that the bridge was no longer safe and should be "retired" was reached by a group of experts from the Ministry of Housing and the Arab Contractors Company, who carried out a thorough technical inspection at the direction of Housing Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Sulaiman. Pictures and a video film showing how the bridge has deteriorated were attached to the group's report. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri approved the report's recommendation, ordering the relocation of the bridge "before a catastrophe takes place", according to an official.

"Relocation is inevitable and final this time," asserted Ibrahim Mehleb, head of the Bridges and Specialised Structures Department at the Arab Contractors Company, and in charge of the relocation project. "Experts are in agreement that Abul-Ela has deteriorated seriously."

The bridge was described as dilapidated as early as 1968. Some repairs were done then, but work was discontinued. "In 1972, the decision was taken to replace Abul-Ela with the 15th of May Flyover... and the bridge was left to deteriorate," explained Mehleb.

According to Salah El-Iskani, a civil engineer with the Arab Contractors Company, the experts' report concluded that corrosion and rust had penetrated 50 per cent of the diagonal and vertical parts of the bridge. Plates binding these parts are also corroded with rust, and rivets have become loose and fallen off. The top section is full of holes and the steel plates of the bridge's floor are seriously corroded, causing its surface to be bumpy and uneven.

"The bridge is endangering the lives of the thousands passing over it every day," declared Sayeda Said, a member of the board of engineers in charge of completing the 15th of May Flyover. "We cannot even have second thoughts about Abul-Ela's relocation."

Relocation has been suggested more than once during the past few years, but the bridge's deterioration was not always the principal reason. Abul-Ela stands in the way of the completion of the second stage of the 15th of May Flyover, which will include an across-the-Nile section of a metro line connecting Shubra Al-Kheima and Giza. If Abul-Ela remained in place, an underwater tunnel would have to be built for the metro, at a cost of LE200 million.

When the relocation idea was first floated, Mahmoud El-Sherif, then governor of Cairo and now minister of local government, suggested that the bridge be turned into an open air museum where artists would exhibit their works.

Relocation, however, ran into budgetary problems. Last year, it would have cost LE15 million, a figure that rose to LE17 million this year. None of the concerned government departments — the Governorate of Cairo and the ministries of housing, culture and local government — seemed to be ready to put up the necessary funds. But the problem was finally ironed out when Cairo Governorate pledged to pay for the relocation.

When a decision was taken last year to move Abul-Ela to a stretch of the Nile in front of the World Trade Centre, relocation plans ran into opposition for technical reasons. Engineers warned that if the bridge were dismantled, it would be very difficult to reassemble. Rivers were said to be too rusty to be fixed again.

Citing Abul-Ela's historical and architectural value, President Hosni Mubarak responded by ordering that the bridge remain in place.

But this decision has now been reversed, and the government has provisionally approved the relocation plan prepared by the Arab Contractors Company. "Foreign companies have offered alternative plans [for relocation] which are still under consideration," Mehleb said. But he is confident that Egyptian engineers are more than capable of handling the relocation. "The process is, no doubt, complicated and precise, but with careful calculations and studies, I hope we will do a good job and our success will become the talk of the international media."

According to the plan, the bridge will be lifted in eight parts, using hydraulic jacks, and then lowered onto floating pontoons which will be pulled by tugs to the new site — yet to be decided. This is expected to take up to six months, after which work on the second stage of the 15th of May Flyover will start.

According to a study by the Arab Contractors Company, Abul-Ela's shutdown is unlikely to cause traffic jams because alternative routes are available. Vehicles heading from Shubra to Zamalek can use the Rod Al-Farag Bridge; those coming from downtown may take the 15th of May Flyover and those coming from Tahrir have easy access to the 6th of October Bridge.

Any possibilities of repairing rather than relocating the bridge have been completely ruled out. El-Iskani believes the bridge is beyond repair, and while Mehleb concedes that repair work is technically possible he argues that it would not be feasible because if Abul-Ela remains in place, it would hinder completion of the 15th of May Flyover.

Relocation may be welcome news to engineers, but it has aroused the concern of intellectuals and Culture Ministry officials, who fear that the historic bridge may never be re-assembled.

"I'm afraid that Abul-Ela is doomed to the same destiny as the statue base in Tahrir Square," said Sabri Nashed, head of the Museums and Exhibitions Department at the Ministry of Culture. Plans for building a statue featuring one of Egypt's leaders — Saad Zaghloul, Gamal Abdel-Nasser or Anwar Sadat — and placing it atop the base in the square have never been put into action, and the base remains statueless. "The bridge will be similarly dismantled and then left to oblivion," Nashed said.

Officials at the Supreme Council of Antiquities expressed despair over whether the bridge would be salvaged. "What can I do, now that the decision has been taken?" said Abdel-Halim Noureddin, the council's secretary-general. He complained that the relocation decision was taken without making a comprehensive study of the new site or the preparations that should be made if the bridge is to be turned into a museum. "If anything, this means Abul-Ela is likely to end up in the hands of scrap dealers," Noureddin warned.

Artist and critic Hassan Oseini objects to the plan on the grounds that relocating the bridge will mean a loss of its historical and artistic significance. "The rococo ornamentation of the bridge should not be the only concern," he said. What makes the bridge unique, he believes, is its site. "The bridge features in many old stories and its historical background lends it a romantic air. When it is moved it will lose its historical, aesthetic and romantic value," he said.

Abul-Ela was built at the beginning of this century by a French firm — Five Lille — with another company, Eiffel, contributing to the construction of some parts of the bridge. It is for this reason that Gustav Eiffel, the architect who built the Eiffel tower, is sometimes mistakenly credited with constructing Abul-Ela.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

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New lease on financing

Financial leasing firms, writes **Amina El-Oteify**, offer some investors financing that banks do not have the legal framework to provide

Although introduced into the Egyptian market nearly one year ago, the concept of financial leasing has yet to catch on. The system, brought about through the Financial Leasing Law of 1995 as part of the government's economic reform package, is designed to facilitate the financing of projects by providing assets such as equipment and buildings, which can be leased instead of purchased.

The law allowed for the creation of financial leasing companies, which are legal entities which may be individuals, corporate or partnership companies, whose task is to provide funding for investors who could not raise enough capital to purchase a needed asset. In such cases, a financial leasing company would purchase the asset and lease it to the project holders. If the assets are movable, like machinery, the purchase is done through a supplier. But in the case of buildings and other immovable assets, the building is constructed by a contractor, and the financial leasing company is the titleholder. The asset is then leased out, over a period of time, with payments made in instalments at a rate that covers the price of the asset plus a profit margin for the company.

Once the leasing contract between the financial leasing company and the project has expired, the project owners have the option of purchasing the asset, or the financial leasing company can lease it out again.

In order for a bank to engage in financial leasing activities, it must obtain prior approval from the Central Bank of Egypt. Securing approval is imperative given that the Banking and Credit Law prohibits banks from dealing in movable or immovable assets either through purchase, sale or barter.

The new law also enables foreigners to import equipment for leasing, which is an exception to import laws which prohibit foreigners from engaging in import activities. Financial leasing firms enjoy a five-year tax holiday on profits generated from their business.

One may question why a project may elect to finance its assets through financial leasing instead of going to the banks for a loan. The answer is simple. Financial leasing companies provide an invaluable source of funding for project owners who lack the necessary collateral to secure financing through a bank. These firms are able to provide 100 per cent financing by the fact that they are the owners of the asset. This is not the case with the banks, which usually require a financial leverage with a ratio of liabilities to net worth of 1:1.

Moreover, the financial leasing company does not require any kind of security against its services, through mortgaging the assets or pledging of deposits. Its only guarantee is maintaining ownership of the assets leased to the project, contrary to banks which rarely provide funds with no security.

Finally, they offer cheaper financing terms. While banks charge a high interest rate and commissions on loans, these companies require only the rental price plus a mark-up for a reasonable profit margin.

The writer is a lawyer with Shalaky law office.

Privatisation picks up speed

The government plans to sell another 50 public sector companies over the next few months. Many analysts argue it is about time. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

In an attempt to accelerate the privatisation process, the Ministerial Committee for Privatisation (MCP), headed by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, decided earlier this month to sell off 50 state-owned companies. While 75 per cent of the shares of eight of these companies are to be put up for public subscription this month, the remaining companies will be sold over the next four months. The estimated total value of these shares is LE900 million. On the block are the Memphis Pharmaceuticals and Chemicals Company, the Arab Drug Company, El-Nasr for Utilities and Installation, Egyptian Metallic Construction Company (Metallica), the Arab Company for Transistors and Electrical Equipment (Telenis), Shebin El-Khaima Spinning and Weaving, Egyptian Starch, Yeast and Detergent and the Middle and West Delta Flour Mills.

During an MCP meeting held last Sunday, the committee also approved another list of 100 companies to be privatised in 1997. Atif Ebeid, the minister of the public sector, stated that the government aims to generate revenue totalling as much as LE5 billion from the sale of the first 50 state-owned companies.

While government officials and some analysts welcomed the move as giving the privatisation programme a much-needed push, others argued that the recent burst of activity on the part of the government was triggered by pressure exerted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Government officials, however, state that the recent move is a continuation of El-Ganzouri's decision last February to privatise 72 public sector companies.

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Mokhtar Khatib, an adviser to Atif Ebeid and a member of the MCP, said that El-Ganzouri's decision to privatise 50 companies falls in line with the government's plan to eventually move to a free-market economy.

"In light of this philosophy, the MCP adopted two basic criteria in its choice of companies on the new privatisation list," said Khatib. "The first of the two includes the activity of the company in terms of whether it is part of a strategic industry

that will be abandoned as a result of the liberalised market policies." This criterion also includes whether the company will be sold off entirely, or if less than 50 per cent of its shares will be sold.

"The MCP decided to keep in the hands of the holding companies the majority of shares in the companies manufacturing aluminium, flour, pharmaceuticals and cigarettes," explained Khatib. "However, the majority stake in companies manufacturing chocolates, biscuits, milk, matches, insecticides, soap and dried agricultural products, however, will be sold off."

The second set of criteria is based on the profitability of the companies in fiscal year 1994/95. According to Khatib, the profit margin has been the main catalyst which prompted both investors and individuals alike to buy the majority of shares in companies traded on the stock market over the last few years.

The past success has injected a strong measure of optimism with regard to these sales. "This optimism," said Khatib, "is soundly founded because there has been a good deal of interest on the stock market to buy the shares of these eight companies."

Also fueling his optimism is the successful sale of shares of three companies which were privatised this month: Kafir El-Zayat Pesticides and Chemicals Company (45 per cent of shares), Mistr Oil

and Soap (53 per cent) and the Nile Match and Prefabricated Wood Houses Company (64.7 per cent). These three companies, which were privatised as part of El-Ganzouri's decision last February to sell roughly 72 public sector companies were successful, profit-making enterprises, and public interest in purchasing their shares was high, noted Khatib.

"This is why we decided to place these shares on the market over the last few days," he said. "There is enough money on the market to absorb about five companies each week."

The majority of officials and analysts note that this recent decision is a definite step in the right direction. But others are more critical, arguing that the privatisation programme has been moving too slowly.

Although there has been a lot of movement recently on the privatisation front, argued Dr Ahmed Abu Ismail, a former finance minister and a Wafdist member of parliament, the results are still not encouraging enough. "To a great extent," he said, "this is due to the fact that Egyptians still see this programme as an example of the government's conceding to IMF's orders. This idea, however, is wrong."

"But the government," he added, "has not done much to convince people that privatisation and liberalisation are the panacea to many of the coun-

try's deeply-rooted economic problems."

The leftists, or the "old guard," as Abu Ismail prefers to refer to them, are largely responsible for slowing down the privatisation process. They have managed to rouse the concerns of workers in public sector companies against privatisation and have helped in filing cases in court in opposition to the sale of public sector assets, he said.

"El-Ganzouri's government, nonetheless, has done very well with the recent spurt in privatisation, and the continued improvement in the performance of public sector companies (both sold and unsold) will help people to realise that privatisation improves the financial situation of these companies and attracts new investors," he noted.

Tawfik Abdou Ismail, a member of the People's Assembly Planning and Budget Committee, stated that the sluggish pace of reform and privatisation is mainly due to a conflict between the government and foreign consulting firms over the valuation of assets.

"This problem is exacerbated when the company is found to have large areas of land in strategic urban locations, as was the case with the Broilera Company and El-Nasr Transformers Company (El-Macu)," said Ismail. "In these instances, the sale of the company can be delayed."

But, he added, the privatisation programme has been moving at a faster pace since the new phase was launched in February by El-Ganzouri. And, he said, statistics released by his committee reveal that the overall burden of the public sector's losses, for the first time in five years, is not growing. The number of loss-making public sector companies, out of the remaining 290 companies to be privatised, dropped from 119 to 90 in 1992. As a whole, public sector companies registered net profits of LE1.5 billion in 1995.

The programme can be accelerated, stated Ismail, by concentrating on selling companies to "groups of investors" who specialise in certain industries. "This means that these investors can do a great deal to improve the company's performance and raise productivity rates which, ultimately, is the main aim of privatisation," explained Ismail.

How much?

THE PRIVATISATION programme under Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri has witnessed a recent surge in activity since last February. On 14 February, El-Ganzouri decided to privatise 72 companies. At the time, the revenue of public assets in Egypt totaled LE5.6 billion. These revenues were accrued from the total sale of three companies, Pepsi Cola (LE156.7 million), Coca-Cola (LE322 million) and El-Nasr Broilers and Pressure Vessels Company (LE56 million), as well as the di-

vestiture of more than 90 per cent of the assets of nine land reclamation companies. Additionally, 20 to 40 per cent of the shares in 16 companies were put up for sale on the stock market.

These initiatives resulted in the reduction of the number of state-owned companies from 319 to 290. And, out of these 290 remaining companies, the 72 selected by El-Ganzouri to be privatised were to be sold off totally or partially. By June, the sales had netted LE5.8 billion.

More power to the people

Five Middle Eastern countries are linking their electricity grids in an attempt to meet growing demand and cut costs. **Zelnab Abul-Gheit and Eman Abdel-Moati** report

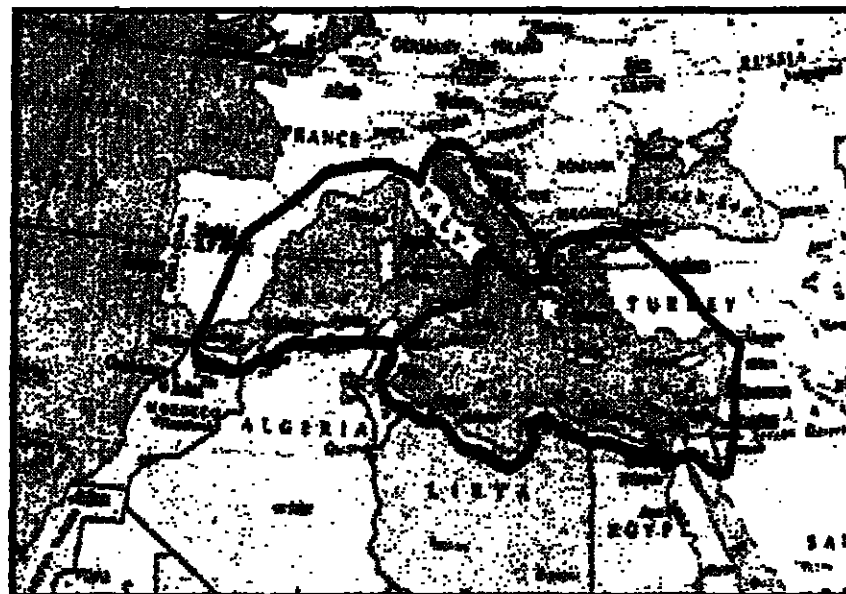
As part of a three-tier mega-project linking Egypt's power grid to that of several neighbouring North African, European and Asian countries, the Egyptian Ministry of Electricity signed an agreement with Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Syria.

This agreement, dubbed the Five Countries Interconnection Project (FCIP), is the first of the three to be signed, and allows for the linking of Egypt's power grid to those of the other four signatories by the year 2002. Once completed, the extended power grid will link Egypt with Asia through Syria and Jordan, and to Europe through Turkey.

The second project is the Pan-Arab Interconnection Project between Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. The third is the Mediterranean Sea Power Pool Project, which will join the nations of North Africa to those of southern Europe. This project involves extending the link from Egypt to Libya and the Maghreb countries on to Spain through Morocco, and finally, to Turkey through Europe.

According to Engineer Maher Aziz, director of Environmental Studies Department in the Electricity and Energy Authority, joining power grids allows the various countries to rely on the others' power supply during local peak hours when demand often exceeds supply. Statistics from the Ministry of Electricity and Energy reveal that over the last decade, the demand for electricity in Egypt has increased tremendously. In 1981, peak demand for power was 3,250 megawatts per hour (mw/h), but in 1995, this demand had rocketed to 8,500mw/h. By the year 2015, this figure is expected to reach 20,000mw/h.

"Joining the grids," said Aziz, "will help in meeting this increasing de-



Once completed the power grid will link Africa, Asia and Europe

mand."

The benefits of electrical interconnection, however, are economic as well as technical. During the 3rd Afro-Asian International Conference in early 1996, Maher Abaza, Egypt's minister of electricity and energy, said that, economically, Egypt will be able to depend on the other countries connected to the grid during its peak-hour demand while being able to store its supply of electricity during the other countries' peak hours. As a result, the cost of energy will decrease as supply exceeds demand. In fact, say some experts, the five states who signed the first agreement earlier this month, could expect to save up to \$2 billion per year by utilising

Jordan and Turkey's excess power generating capabilities.

Ultimately, the project will be beneficial to all parties involved. Along with reducing the price of the electricity, some of the signatory states will be entitled to collect duties as the power passes through their territories. Also, the exchange of experts and information will promote technical cooperation in the field of electricity between the parties involved.

With the FCIP scheduled to begin operation in 1997, a 500 kilo volt (kv) transmission line is being laid, crossing Sinai from Suez to Taba. This line will be connected in Agaba to the 400kv Jordanian system. Jordan, Syria, Iraq

and Turkey will all be interconnected through 400kv transmission lines. The project is being financed by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, while the Turkish portion of the project is being financed by the European Investment Bank.

According to Abaza, the FCIP "is no less important than the digging of the Suez Canal," since it links African and Asian countries through electricity.

While work is under way on the Egypt-Jordan power line, the Egypt-Libya link has reached its final stages. A 220kv power line between El-Salloum on the Egyptian border and Tubruq in Libya is being laid down. Another 220kv line between Libya and Tunisia is also being prepared. Tunisia is already connected to Algeria and Morocco. Once the 400kv undersea cable is completed and installed between Morocco and Spain, the nations of North Africa will be connected to Western Europe. This project, said Abaza last June in Italy, will be begun in 1998.

But the Egyptian government, he said, has been exerting tremendous effort since the 1980's to renew and revamp the country's electrical infrastructure in order to guarantee the success of these projects. Efforts are also under way to develop alternate sources of energy such as hydro-electric and natural gas.

Egypt, said Abaza, signed an agreement with Zaire in 1987 to study the feasibility of linking the two countries' power grids in order to capitalise on the huge hydro-electric power source at Inga on the Zaire River. Approximately 50,000mw/h of electricity will be generated through this project, and much of the energy can be exported to Europe through Turkey and Spain. The project will be financed by the African Bank.

Privatisation push

IN LINE with its push to accelerate the privatisation process, the government decided to privatise through the stock market more than 51 per cent of 11 housing companies.

Following a meeting with the General Assembly of the National Company for Construction and Urbanisation, which includes 24 affiliated companies, Atif Ebeid, the minister of the public sector, announced that El-Nasr for Utilities and Installation and El-Nasr for Buildings and Construction will be privatised next month.

The remaining nine companies will be privatised next year, and are considered among the most profitable housing and contracting companies in the country. They include Heliopolis for Housing and Urbanisation, El-Masadi for Urbanisation and Construction, El-Giza General Contracting and Real Estate Investment Company, Atlas General Contracting and Real Estate Investment Company, El-Mahmoudia General Contracting Company, the Egyptian Contracting Company (El-Abd) and El-Nasr General Contracting Company (Hassan Allam).

CMA partnership

A JOINT agreement between the capital markets of four Arab countries is expected to be signed by the end of the year.

The Egyptian Capital Market Authority (CMA) is preparing the articles of the new joint agreement grouping Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain.

"The main aim of this agreement is to encourage investment in these countries by providing for cooperation between the capital markets of the four countries," said Ashraf Shamseddin, deputy chairman of the CMA.

He added that the agreement will facilitate investment measures between these markets by recording all listed companies in the four markets. It will also simplify clearing measures.

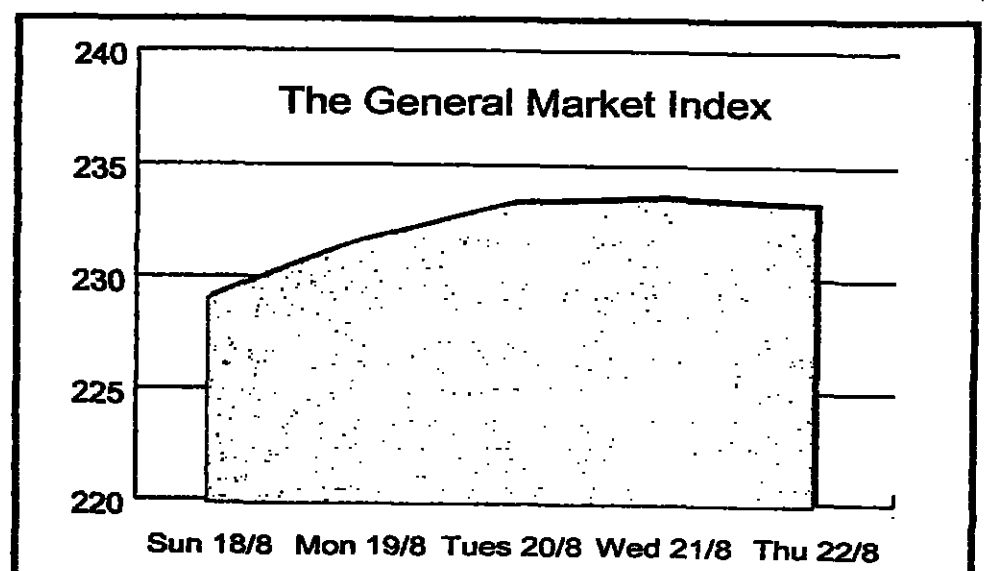
Market report

Financial sector soars

THE STOCK market witnessed another active week of trading, with the General Market Index gaining 3.72 points to close at 233.48. Trading activity for the week ending 22 August was heavy, with LE206.37 million in shares changing hands.

The manufacturing sector's index gained 1.98 points to close at 298.46. This increase was partly a result of a surge in the share values of 23 companies. Topping the list was the Suez Sacks Company, which registered an LE26 per share increase to level off at LE250, while those of the Amariya Rhone Polanc for Pharmaceutical Industries gained LE20 to close at LE360. Shares of Kafir El-Zayat Pesticides and Chemicals caught the attention of investors after they increased in value by 68 per cent to close at LE49.

The index for the financial sector rocketed up by 12.33 points, closing at 246.83 after shares of the Misr Exterior Bank closed at LE600, LE80 higher than their opening price. An LE25 increase in the share value of Misr International Bank (MIBank) also helped boost the sector's in-



dex. MIBank's shares closed at LE295. Floating 65 per cent of its shares, the Nile Matches and Prefabricated Houses Company was the market's shining star of the week. Trading in its shares accounted for 16.8 per cent of

the total volume of transactions. It traded LE1.09 million shares valued at LE34.86 million, and closed at LE27, an increase of LE17 over its opening price.

Other companies, however, such as Cairo for Investment

and Development (CID), had a rough week. CID's shares lost 53.33 per cent of their value and closed at LE14, while those of Al-Ahram Beverages lost LE5 to level off at LE2.

Trading in bonds accounted for only 2.47 per cent of market transactions. In all, 35,373 bonds changed hands.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Lisez

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Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président
et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

The truth of things

The death this week of Ahmed Bahaeddin robs Egyptian journalism of one of its most distinguished practitioners. *Al-Ahram Weekly* remembers the man whose writings, over four decades, came to embody the conscience of the nation



AHMED BHAHAEDDIN, the journalist whose career spanned some of the most turbulent periods of Egypt's modern history, died last Saturday of heart failure at a summer resort near Alexandria. He was 69, and for the past six years, following a debilitating stroke in 1990, had been unable to write.

During a long and distinguished career Bahaeddin edited many of Egypt's leading publications, including *Al-Ahram*, as well as heading the Press Syndicate and the Arab Journalists Federation. His knack for objective news analysis earned him respect throughout the Arab world. Born in Alexandria in 1927, Bahaeddin obtained a university degree in law at the age of 19. He worked for the government as a junior legal aide while contributing articles to a now-defunct magazine called *Fasoul* (Seasons). In 1952 he joined the staff of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef* and, four years later, at the age of 29, was appointed editor-in-chief of the magazine *Sabah El-Kheir* (Good Morning), which was then being launched.

In 1959 he became editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab* newspaper (now defunct), and no relation to the Labour Party's newspaper), and several months later moved to *Al-Ahram* as one of the newspaper's chief editors. In 1962 he was named editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Al-*

her So'a. He was unanimously elected to head the Egyptian Press Syndicate in 1967 and, in 1972, to chair the Arab Journalists Federation. He also contributed articles to *Al-Ahram*, and became its editor-in-chief in 1974, a post he resigned in 1976, largely owing to political differences with the late President Anwar Sadat. He subsequently went to Kuwait, where he edited the magazine *Al-Arab*. He returned to Cairo in 1980 and for the next decade was a regular contributor to *Al-Ahram*, the author of a daily column entitled "Diary". These contributions stopped in 1990 following his stroke.

An unceasing champion of the cause of reason, Bahaeddin was the author of several books, including *Days That Made History*, *Farouk Rex*, *The Myth was Destroyed at Noon* and *Political Legality in the Arab World*. Believing, too, that the Arabs would be better served by knowing their enemy, Bahaeddin published a book entitled *Israeli Affairs*.

An enlightened liberal, Bahaeddin urged a re-writing of Islamic history and a new interpretation of *shari'a* (Islamic law) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). He believed that the male monopoly on Qur'anic exegesis did women an injustice, that thinking was a religious duty and that extremism was simply a form of intellectual sloth. He once drew a

comparison between Muslims and a patient devoting great care to a minor finger wound while neglecting a much more serious heart problem. He also warned, nearly 40 years ago, that branding others as infidel was a "fascist weapon" that could inflict great harm on the cause of enlightenment.

Bahaeddin came under fire as a result of his writing but never faltered. Neither was his respect for others' right to oppose his views shaken.

Although he supported the 1952 Revolution he was not oblivious to its shortcomings. And although he was a personal friend of Sadat, even before he became president, he was a staunch opponent of his policies. A champion of Arab unity, Bahaeddin was the first journalist to call for the establishment of a Palestinian state following the Arab defeat of 1967.

According to columnist Salama, Ahmed Salama, Bahaeddin had five preoccupations in his writings: the homeland, social justice, reason, knowledge and the rights of the citizen. But a lifelong supporter of the arts, Bahaeddin also made occasional forays into the fields of literary and theatre criticism.

Married to a Christian, he was the father of a son and a daughter.

A permanent book market

I believe the idea of a permanent, year round book market was first mooted when the Cairo book fair was inaugurated, in response to the tremendous interest, shown by a broad cross section of the general public, that the event has elicited. Despite the steep rise in the price of books establishing a permanent book market of a reasonable size, and in whatever location, would be of great service to both publishers, searching for outlets, and for a reading public starved of texts.

Grown-ups are the problem

Children's Day has passed leaving the same, nagging question: just what constitutes the most important problem children face? The answer, in my opinion, is quite simple. Grown-ups are the problem. A newborn child is like a blank slate on which anything can be written. And those who write on this blank slate are grown-ups... Those who fill the lines on this clean white sheet are the family, the school, the newspapers, radio, television, public opinion and prejudices witnessed in the street, at home, in the playground... To say that the upbringing of today's children represents our most important investment in the future is not mere rhetoric.

On my first visit to Japan 20 years ago I brought back a 'toy' aeroplane for a child of seven. To put this toy together in Cairo needed the help of more than one engineer friend. Think of that toy, and of the manufacturing giant that Japan has become, and you see the truth of my argument.

History is not

a matter of muck-racking

No nation in the world can afford to ignore its own history. Yet there is a difference, and an important one, between the objective analysis of our history and the seemingly insatiable taste for salacious detail and muck-racking. The latter, unfortunately, has been with us for some time now. When it first reared its head we warned about the dangers, and the warnings went unheeded. So let me repeat anyone who writes history according to his own whims, and in his own image, while imagining he will be the last to do so, is merely following, and propagating, a well established precedent.

The dead and the living

I do not know what Shimon Peres discussed [during his visit to Cairo]. I would, however, like to comment on a news item, published on the day of his arrival, an item about whose consequences and developments I am completely in the dark.

The news item concerned the plan to transfer a Jewish cemetery, presently in the path of the planned Cairo ring road, from its current location to another. This removal is apparently one of the issues Mr Peres wants to discuss.

In Egypt, as in other countries, there are cemeteries for Muslims, Christians, Jews, and for other creeds, none of which escape the exigencies of modern life, and its corollary, urban expansion. But when cemeteries have to be relocated, in Egypt, as in other countries, this is done in accordance with strict rules and regulations.

What I find bizarre, though, is not the insistence that Jewish cemeteries be exempted from such relocation, but that the demand that they should be exempted is being made at precisely that moment when Israel's prime minister is himself talking about the relocation — transferring them from the West Bank — of tens of thousands of living people.

The question here, of course, is not the relocation of graves but the uprooting of an entire life — its cities, villages and farms, its date palms and olive trees, its schools and playgrounds. The Israeli view appears to be that such uprooting is legitimate, while the transfer of a small number of graves is not. (26 July, 1990)

Excerpts from Bahaeddin's regular *Al-Ahram* column, *Diary*

Heart of the matter

Bahaa was incapable of turning away anyone who sought out his testimony on events or his opinions as to their development. He had a pronounced sense of the responsibility of the writer, and could never refuse anyone who asked for his time. Tragically, though, at the very moment in Arab history when a man of his qualities, a man committed to reason and capable of its simplest, most cogent expression, was needed more than ever before he fell prey to an illness that left him bedridden, isolated from events and people, from pen and paper, from public lectures and seminars.

I confess that throughout the Gulf crisis and war there was no voice I missed as much as the voice of Ahmed Bahaeddin. Amid the tidal wave of ink spilt over the bloody events, it was the words of Ahmed Bahaeddin that one missed. He alone was absent, though he, among the legion of commentators, was always the closest to the truth of things, the most capable of uncovering the heart of the matter.

His inexorable retreat into illness did not just deprive us of his balanced, considered judgment. The waste was more, for we were deprived, too, of the experience he had gleaned from five years spent in Kuwait, years in which he worked and wrote, observing the entire Gulf, studying it, and as was his wont, coming to a profound understanding.

Mohamed Hassanein Heikal

Excerpt from *Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's introduction to Ahmed Bahaeddin's Yawmiyat Bahaa Al-Zaman* (Diaries of the Times), published by *Al-Ahram*

The last page

Bahaa is a member of a rare breed — an Arab intellectual over which there exists a majority consensus. For with Bahaa there was always room for agreement, whether over principles, personal characteristics or scholarship. Perhaps it is precisely this quality that allowed him to give something significant to every post he took, to every publication on which he worked.

As editor of *El-Gesl*, a youth magazine, he consistently lent a young and vibrant tone. Moving to a daily newspaper he produced excellent daily coverage. When he was at the helm of a monthly cultural magazine, his policy was to encourage an expansive yet deeply rewarding variety. His contribution to his profession was prolific, and continuously renewed.

Bahaa's talents were legion. He loved the actual business of producing newspapers and magazines, of designing and laying out the pages of a newspaper or the cover of a magazine. And such was his judgement, his ability to visualise how things would look and his understanding of how they worked, that he was truly a one-man production team.

Bahaa was one of the first Arab intellectuals to consolidate his relationships across the Arab world. He maintained close contacts with Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and Gulf intellectuals. Indeed, in his character the feeling of Arab belonging was paramount. It seems sadly appropriate, then, that the crises in his health should have mirrored the crises of the Arab nation. In 1967 he was diagnosed as suffering from diabetes. Following the Sefra and Shatila massacres he developed blood pressure. It was almost as if each event left its mark on his body. And now he has passed away, just at the time when the pan-Arab dream, of which he was a most eloquent proponent and representative, is itself fading from memory.

Fahmy Howeldy

Columnist at *Al-Ahram*

An unassuming master

He came, made humanity richer, then left. No man can do better or more. And yet Ahmed Bahaeddin did so calmly. Neither his voice nor his pen was ever raucous. He gave, he enriched, and silently he left.

Bahaeddin's gift to his readers was to inspire them to think and question, to dare them to hope. And here too, no man could do better.

His thought embraced a panoply of Egyptian concerns; he concerned himself with everything, from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the daily toil and turmoil of the average Egyptian's life. He began to write when ornamentation and rhetoric seemed to reign supreme but had the courage to turn his back on both.

His style and method were uniquely his own. A dedicated rationalist, he approached all issues — whether political or social, domestic, regional or international — with the same rigour, striving to uncover the essence of a phenomenon and define its fundamental features.

His interests were catholic, as were the areas he studied, the subjects upon which he commented. Not was he ever tempted to allow the clamour of urgent issues to drown out more subtle concerns. He was consistent in his emphasis on the necessity for a far-sighted approach to urban planning and his writing promoted a deeper understanding and appreciation of architecture, indeed all the arts. And long before the environment was a fashionable subject he was an eloquent advocate of conservation.

In brief, Bahaa was a unique equation, the sum of a deep sense of the "East" and a mature assimilation of the "West". This unique mix was compounded by an in-



Illustration: Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enain

Ahmed Bahaeddin was one of the younger members of a generation of outstanding journalists that included Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, Mustafa and Ali Amin and Amna El-Said among others. For three decades, between the '50s to the late '80s, he also acted as the mentor and model for generations of aspiring journalists.

It was Bahaa who taught me the importance of both an incessantly questioning approach and the ability to forecast future turns in events.

The last issue he tackled was the emigration of Russian Jews to Israel, which he dubbed "the crime of the century". Today Soviet Jews occupy seven seats in the Knesset, and they continue to flow into Israel. In the coming days many will write about his unerring prescience; his remarkable foresight about the events that have led to the situation we witness today.

His writings would often occasion worried frowns on the brows of statesmen and men of religion alike. He wrote always under the threat that his writing would one day be banned — this despite the fact that he was the shyest, most modest of men.

Though most of his writing was politically oriented — starting with *Al-Nasra Al-Rabi'a* (The Fourth Stage) — which attacked the American manoeuvres — and *Farouk Al-Malik*, he was also a connoisseur of literature and the arts, areas he tackled in several articles, reprinted as part of his final book *Yawmiyat Bahaa Al-Zaman* (Diaries of the Times).

Bahaa epitomises a generation of extremely gifted intellectuals who were never tempted by the easy option. It is a generation of which few remain.

Abdel-Ghani Abul-Enain

Artist and layout editor

An empty space

It was in the hope that someday Ahmed Bahaeddin would be able once more to take up his pen that we at *Al-Ahram* decided to keep free the space on the back-page where his daily column had for so long been published. Who among us would have had the courage, the audacity to take the place of Ahmed Bahaeddin...? No other writer could have hoped to fill his shoes. Yet even as we were beseeching God that he would regain consciousness, he boarded that craft on which he will navigate the river from which there can be no return.

Ahmed Bahaeddin never liked flattery and always shied away from praise... Moreover, he was deeply concerned about the future of Egyptian journalism and journalism's... But I shall not speak here about Ahmed Bahaeddin's work as a journalist. To do him justice would require an entire book. Suffice to say that when, at the age of 29, he was appointed editor-in-chief of *Sabah El-Kheir* he was the youngest person to hold such a post in the history of Egyptian journalism. And when he was appointed editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* 22 years ago, he had reached the apex of his career.

Ibrahim Nafie

Excerpts from Ibrahim Nafie's front-page obituary, *Al-Ahram*, 26 August

Passing of an era

Bahaa, whose journalistic career began in the second half of the 20th century, lived and worked during the most tumultuous period of Egypt's modern history. He lived through the July Revolution, the exile of the king, the crisis of 1954 and the demonstrations, the tripartite aggression of 1956.

Such momentous events demanded men capable of meeting the challenges they posed. And there were, too, other, movements of equal importance, both domestically and internationally — there was Arab unity, and the struggle, facing all of the Third World, to develop and modernise.

These formed the backdrop, the context within which Bahaa worked. Certainly it is no coincidence that he was part of a group of immensely talented intellectuals, including Youssef Ibra, Salah Abdel-Sabour, Salah Jahin, Hassan Fouad and Gamal Kamel, all of whom learned the fundamentals of their trade in *Rose El-Youssef*.

In paying our last respects to Bahaa it is, I feel, no overstatement to say that we are paying our respects not to an individual but to the age he represented. It is an era, itself, that has passed away with Bahaa.

Professionally I was always drawn to Bahaa's tone, to his voice, his rigour, his erudition and his knowledge. He was acquainted with literature, poetry and the plastic arts, as well as with the pressing social issues of his day. Erudite and meticulous, fully engaged with his society — these are the qualities that marked Bahaa, these the reasons why I, and many of my contemporaries, feel that his passing away is no less than a calamity.

Mustafa Nabil

Editor-in-chief of *Al-Hilal* cultural monthly

Eyes on the future

Perhaps because he had such a dear place in my heart I have always imagined that I had the same place in his. I know that this is unlikely, but it is an illusion I enjoy.

With Bahaa I shared secrets I will share with no one else. And it was with Bahaa that I have had the most stimulating conversations to which I, at least, have ever been party. He was a man of the most extraordinary intelligence and perception. By his side I invariably felt dull and somehow diminished — an admission that, even now, it is difficult to make. In light-hearted moments he would sometimes laugh until his eyes brimmed with tears. He would mock others and at the same time would laugh at himself.

Beneath his tough exterior Bahaa was, I think, a very emotional man. In three decades a never saw him shed a tear, but I well remember his sadness when Sadat banned him from working in journalism. Almost every morning I would meet with Bahaa and others, who like ourselves had been banned from writing, and we would stroll along the Nile by the Sheraton. On one such stroll I remember I asked him why he appeared so depressed and he replied that, ever since he had graduated, he had devoted himself to his work, arriving at his office promptly every morning, leaving only when the day was done. Now, he said, he had been forced to break the habit of a lifetime.

He was an immensely rational man, and in many ways appears now to have been ahead of his time. His thoughts had turned to the shape of the coming century some 25 years ago. He was merciless in his castigation of backward looking rulers and regimes and always wanted others to share his optimism in the possibility of a brighter, better future.

Saad Kamel

Writer



photo: Mohamed El-Qti

sustainable curiosity, a desire to know and understand everything to be known, about the age and its components, whether political, economic, philosophic or social.

This desire to understand, this breadth of vision, was perhaps underwritten by his love of the arts. He was driven to explore the full scope and meaning of beauty in all its manifestations, and spared no appreciation for them all.

A rare equation: rejecting rigidity and narrow-mindedness Ahmed Bahaeddin strove always after openness in thought and independence of intellect.

Bahaa's passing has left a gap in all our lives, a sense of loss made more difficult by the fact that the master had been forced into silence for six years before his final passing.

It is a sense of loss I have felt in a very concrete way. Since the launching of *Al-Ahram Weekly* more than five years ago I have often found myself on the verge of heading to Bahaa's office upstairs, expecting to be met with the usual broad smile, to find him, as always, ready to help, offering advice and guidance as calmly and modestly as he always did.

"What does the master have to say about our new experiment?" It is a question that has often crossed my mind during the past five, challenging years.

The master began his long journey in silence, and could never make our meeting. But his call to reason remains with us always. It is the gift that he offered us, and the gift that remains.

Hosny Guindy

Clipping Hizbullah's wings

Are Hizbullah's poor prospects in Lebanon's elections a result of marginalisation or a shift from religious extremism, **Graham Usher** asks from South Lebanon

In a neat, tree-lined car park in downtown West Beirut, a crowd gathers to listen to Mohamed Berjawi, Hizbullah's candidate for one of the two seats assigned to the Shi'ite community for the Beirut segment of Lebanon's parliamentary elections. "The only reason the people of Beirut can hold their heads high is because of Hizbullah's resistance in South Lebanon," says Berjawi to prolonged applause. Yet the crowd is small, with only 100 in attendance. They are also apprehensive. The previous week — in the first round of Lebanon's elections for the Mount Lebanon district — Hizbullah failed to keep its seat in Baabda, part of the Mount Lebanon electoral district which includes Beirut's Shi'ite southern suburbs, viewed as a Hizbullah stronghold. Last Sunday, two candidates from the radical Sunni Islamic Association (IA) — who formed a bloc of 12 Islamist MPs with Hizbullah in the outgoing parliament — lost their seats in the North Lebanon elections. In Mount Lebanon, Hizbullah lost out to candidates aligned with Nabih Berri's Shi'ite (and pro-Syrian) Amal Movement; in the north, the IA lost to supporters of Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

For political commentators like deputy editor of the *As-Safir* newspaper, Mohamed Mashmouhi, such shifts in political fortune signal the demise of religious extremism and a "return to Lebanon's more moderate traditions." But Hizbullah detects a more sinister hand at work. "There is a US-led conspiracy against Hizbullah," says Hizbullah parliamentary aide, Hassan Ismail. "And the Lebanese government is trying to marginalise us." Born in the aftermath of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Hizbullah has since acquired a reputation as Lebanon's sole remaining (and most effective) political militia, especially through its resistance to Israel's 18-year occupation in South Lebanon. Yet, until the late 1980s, Hizbullah was viewed by most Lebanese as an Iranian import, with its call for an "Islamic Lebanon" utterly at odds with Lebanon's multi-confessional character.

In 1989 — under the prodding of the movement's spiritual guide, Hussein Fad-

lallah — Hizbullah made a strategic turn to enter mainstream Lebanese politics, in anticipation of Lebanon's first post-civil war elections held in 1992.

The new line proved successful. In the 1992 poll, Hizbullah returned eight deputies to Lebanon's then 108 (now 128) member parliament, including six from the mainly Shi'ite Bekaa Valley. These gains, says Mashmouhi, had less to do with Hizbullah's military resistance in the south or its Islamist ideology than with its "ability to provide social services for the masses" in the absence of any governmental provision. It is a model of social activism. Since the 1992 elections, Hizbullah has extended its services to South Lebanon, hoping for similar political rewards in the coming elections.

After Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" onslaught on Lebanon last April, Hizbullah spokespersons estimate that it has repaired 5,000 Lebanese homes, rebuilt roads and other infrastructure and paid compensation to 2,300 farmers, mainly in South Lebanon. Neutral observers agree such figures are probably accurate. "Hizbullah in Lebanon is seen primarily as a social movement, as the defender of the poor," says Lebanese social scientist, Paul Salim.

Such public provision compares favourably with the relative lack of government-run services and those provided by Lebanon's Council of the South, headed by Amal, historically the strongest Shi'ite party in the south. The political result, says Salim, is that there were a straight contest for the Shi'ite vote in South Lebanon. "Hizbullah would probably win around 60 per cent of the mandates."

But there is not going to be a straight contest. First, Lebanon's complex electoral system compels candidates representing one confession to form blocs with parties representing other confessions, so for Hizbullah to win any of the 13 Shi'ite seats in the south will require a pact with Christian candidates who have five seats.

But the main reason is that — unlike the 1992 elections — this time Amal is not interested in any coalition with Hizbullah, for fear of Amal losing its political hegemony in the south. "It is a

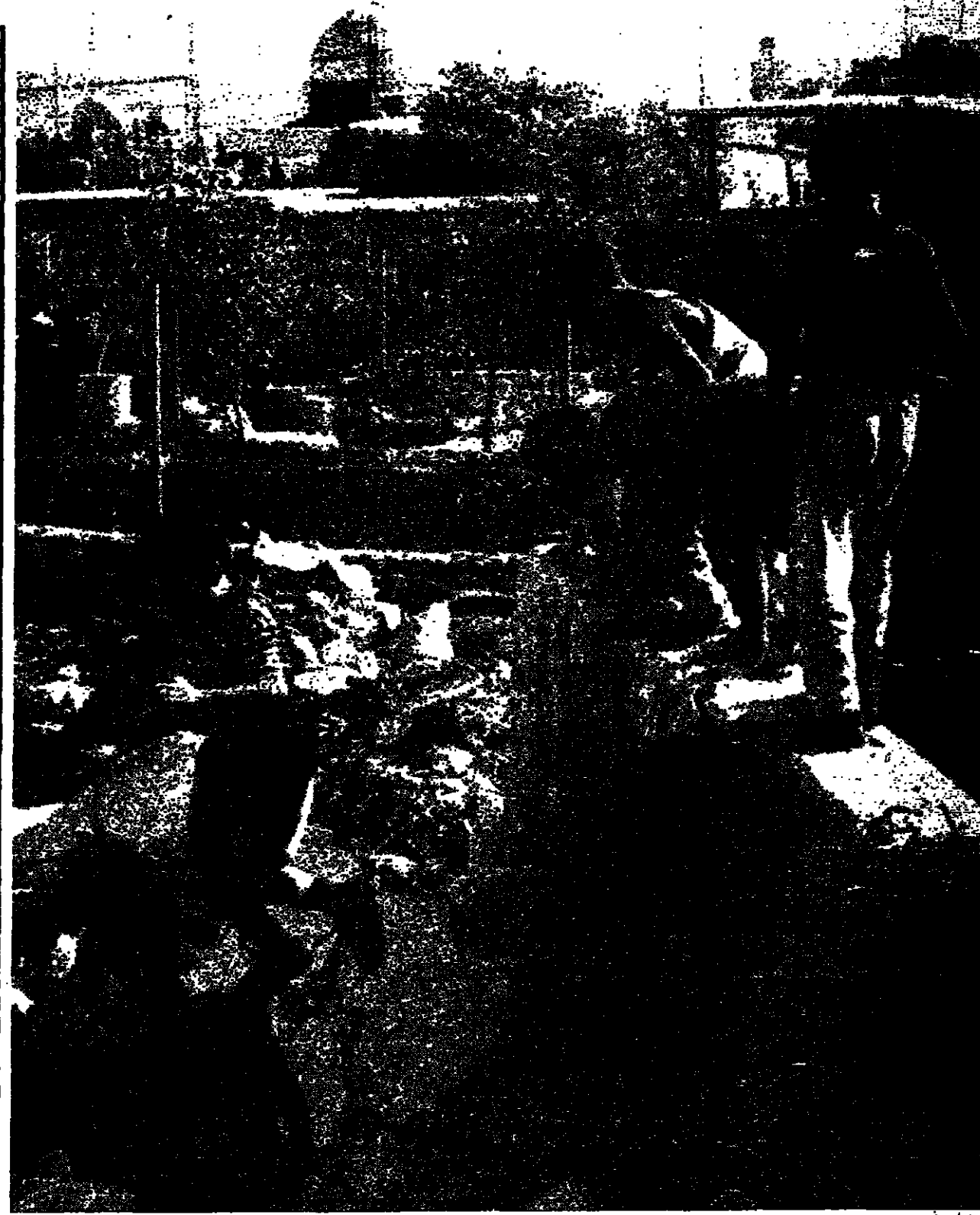
struggle for the leadership of the Shi'ite community," says Mashmouhi.

Attempts to form a united list between Hizbullah and Amal broke down over the issue of representation in the south. "We are not against a coalition with Amal," says Hassan Ismail. "But we insist on having equal shares." Hizbullah is the dominant Shi'ite force in the south by common consent. Yet, out of the 13 Shi'ite seats, Amal was willing to grant only two or three. For its part, Amal accuses Hizbullah of wanting not just equal shares, but a veto over all candidates on any agreed list, including those representing the Christian and Sunni communities.

The result is stalemate, less than 10 days before the poll for South Lebanon. Syria — which backs Amal but is wary of Hizbullah's increasing prowess in South Lebanon — is currently engaged in frantic mediation efforts between Hizbullah and Amal to get them to agree on a joint list for South Lebanon. Should these efforts fail, Hizbullah may form a list with a medley of leftist and Nasserite parties against Amal and its pro-government allies. This will not only raise the heat (as well as the prospect of violence) between Hizbullah and Amal during next week's electoral run-in in South Lebanon. It will be read — regionally as much as domestically — as an act of defiance by Hizbullah against Syria, a gesture that is unlikely to be received well in Damascus.

But what impact such tensions will have on Hizbullah's longer term strategy for Lebanon is less clear. "When Hizbullah stood for the elections in 1992, many people said this signified an easing of the military resistance against Israel in the south," says Mashmouhi, "but the resistance increased. Whether Hizbullah gets a larger or smaller share of seats in the next parliament is unlikely to affect its military strategy."

Hizbullah, too, appears resigned to the prospect that it may be squeezed in these elections, that, as the Lebanese say, its wings may be clipped. "It is not necessary to have parliamentary seats to be strong in Lebanon," says Hassan Ismail. "It is more important to have a base among the people."



Palestinian boys play on the ruins of a community centre in Jerusalem's old city. This week Israeli authorities bulldozed the centre. PLO leader Yasser Arafat called for a general strike in protest against Israeli moves to expand settlements (photo: AFP)

Clan reigns in Lebanon poll

Lebanon held the second round of five-phase national elections on Sunday in the North Lebanon Governorate. While many of the candidates who won had been expected to do so, there were quite a few surprises.

The elections in the north were very different from that in Mount Lebanon where the battle was clearly between opponents and supporters of the government.

The results in the north showed the failure of the Christian Phalangist Party, the Communist Party and the Syrian Nationalist Party as well as Islamic groups to win large numbers of votes.

A major surprise was that relatively newcomers on the political scene were able to acquire more votes. Newcomer Mushab Al-Abdab's victory in the district of Tripoli had more votes than former prime minister and opposition candidate Omar Karameh who headed an election ticket and Transportation Minister Osman Miskawi.

Another surprise was the victory of Boutros Harb, a Maronite opposition figure and former education minister. He had boycotted the last general elections.

But in general, many of the prominent candidates and incumbent deputies were re-elected. The four ministers who were also running won seats.

Analysts had described the North Lebanon ballot as confusing because none of the five election tickets could be dubbed as anti- or pro-government. Each coalition ticket had supporters from both sides. And those in the opposition are not against the government's pro-Syria line unlike in Mount Lebanon. Given that there was no clear distinction between election tickets, voters tended to vote according to individual candidates and not complete slates. Karameh's National Solidarity list, for example, was nominally an opposition ticket but it had a few government supporters on it.

There was also the tendency to vote according to family and clan allegiance in the north. There are a few families who are politically influential in certain areas like the Franjeh and Karameh families. But some believe this tradition is slowly becoming unpopular. "In North Lebanon, many cast their ballots according to their loyalty to

families who have political clout. It is true families and political chiefs have and will always play a role in Lebanese politics. But with time this will change and people will be more interested in political programmes. But then again these families offer voters services and this gains their loyalty," said Habib Kayrouz, an unsuccessful Maronite candidate.

Voter turnout among the 578,000 eligible voters in the north was relatively high. It was approximately 50 per cent compared to 30 per cent in the 1992 poll.

More than 130 candidates were vying for 28 seats allotted to the North Lebanon Governorate in the 128-member half-Christian half-Muslim parliament. The seats are allocated to nine Maronites, 11 Sunnis, two Alawites and six Greek Orthodox.

Security was tight and only minor infringements were reported. Some candidates complained of voting irregularities but independent observers said there were no wide scale electoral abuses unlike what was seen in Mount Lebanon. This view is shared by Issam Fares, a Greek Orthodox candidate who won a seat in parliament. He

In the absence of a clear opposition, family loyalties rather than political affiliations determined the outcome of the North Lebanon elections, reports **Zeina Khodr**

said: "The elections in the north were conducted in a high-class and sportsmanlike atmosphere. No candidates attacked each other as was the case in the Mount Lebanon poll where candidates traded insults. There were complaints of abuses but none were really significant."

According to George Deeb, professor of international law at the Lebanese University, the general elections in Lebanon are taking the shape of a race between moderates and extremists as declared by Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri. "This is clearly shown by the failure of Hizbullah to keep its seat in the Mount Lebanon elections. The Christians in the electoral district did not give their votes to Hizbullah's candidate Ali Ammar. Also, Ammar lost the vote of the Druze community after its leader Walid Jumblatt supported the other election ticket. But the polls in South Lebanon and the Bekaa will be different. There, the Christian vote is not significant and the group will be able to keep its seats."

Deeb added that the Christian and Muslim extremists in the north did not have enough political weight to tip the balance.

The Islamic Group and the pro-Syrian Abbas, both allies of Syria, lost their seats in parliament in the North Lebanon elections. Some analysts attributed this to the high voter turnout. They say the groups are supported by a minority in the area.

The Christian extremist organisation, the now banned Lebanese Forces (LF) militia, has also lost its influence. Its leader, Samir Geagea, is serving two life sentences. In 1992, when Geagea's political power was at its zenith, the predominantly-Maronite town of Bekaa headed his call for a boycott and the lowest participation rate was registered. This year, residents of Geagea's hometown, headed to the polls in relatively large numbers. According to Kayrouz: "Things have changed. The LF is no longer an organised party and they are not able to play an important role."

Elections in the remaining three governorates — Beirut, South Lebanon and the Bekaa — will take place over the next three weeks. Sixty-three seats have already been determined. And there is already a clear trend that the new legislature will be overwhelmingly pro-government.

Amman expels Iraqis

FOLLOWING last week's bread riots in southern Jordan, three Iraqi Embassy staff members — the press attaché and the first secretary, and an administrator — were expelled from the country.

Jordan's Information Minister Marwan Muasher said that the Jordanian government had evidence implicating Iraq and the Jordanian Arab Socialist Baath Party (JASBP) in the riots that began over a three-fold hike in bread prices. Jordanian officials also hinted that the government might dissolve the JASBP for violating Jordanian laws.

However, the JASBP, a pro-Iraqi organisation with one deputy in the 80-seat lower house of parliament, denied involvement in the unrest.

Government attempts to link the rioting to outside instigators have been treated with skepticism by many politicians and Jordanian citizens, who also blame the protest on mounting economic problems and rising levels of poverty and unemployment.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian army withdrew its heavy presence from Karak, where the riots first started, and lifted the curfew imposed on the city's residents. Authorities also began releasing thousands of detainees. Alleged pro-Iraqi activists, however, are expected to stand trial soon.

Hijackers flee home

THE BRITISH government said yesterday that the seven Iraqis who hijacked a Sudanese airliner, re-routing it to London on Monday, will be questioned to determine whether to prosecute them, grant them political asylum or deport them.

The hijackers commandeered the Sudanese plane as it left Khartoum, heading to Amman. The plane, which carried 186 passengers, landed in Cyprus's Larnaca Airport for refuelling, before continuing to London. After seven hours of negotiations, the hijackers surrendered at Stansted Airport in England.

According to an AP report, Iraqi opposition groups said the hijackers were staff members of the Iraqi Embassy in Khartoum who were afraid to return home after being summoned back to Baghdad. British police are also investigating the possible involvement of six female relatives of the hijackers, who were travelling with them on the flight.

Al-Aqsa Mosque under threat

Statements issued last week by several Arab and Islamic countries and organisations warned Israel against continuing threats to Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque, reports **Lebna Gomma**. Arab and Islamic fears about the status of the sites have increased sharply since the election of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in late May. Shortly after his narrow victory, Israel's Supreme Military Court issued a ruling allowing an ultra-orthodox Jewish group to pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque, causing a furor among Muslims everywhere. Palestinian officials expressed their concern that Al-Aqsa might suffer the same fate as Al-Ibrahimi

Mosque in Hebron, where Muslims and Jews must divide their praying days.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat described the court's decision as "an affront to Muslims." He referred to the agreement between Palestinians and former Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, following the occupation of the holy city in 1967, allowing Jews to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque only as tourists.

Arafat called for an immediate meeting of the Arab and Muslim members of the "Jerusalem Committee," headed by King Hassan II of Morocco, to discuss Israel's violations and the deteriorating situation in Jerusalem.

Other top Palestinian officials warned that Israel's continued vi-

olations of Muslim rights to Al-Aqsa Mosque would destroy the peace process.

Faisal Al-Husseini, PLO executive responsible for the Jerusalem file, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview that Palestinians will not allow what happened in Hebron to be repeated at Al-Aqsa Mosque "otherwise there will be massacres... the only way for Israel to take over Al-Aqsa is over our dead bodies," he continued. Hussein said that Palestinians have a plan for protecting the mosque from Jewish violations.

"The first part of the plan involves being continually present in the mosque, not giving Jewish extremists the chance to enter. The second part requires confronting

Jewish violations from the beginning."

In a recent interview, Palestinian top negotiator Mahmoud Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, said "I hope the Israeli government will be rational regarding the court order and prevent its implementation, because its consequences could be disastrous."

Meanwhile, the Muslim World League issued a statement in Mecca, asking all Muslims "to work on annulling the latest Israeli court decision, through all available channels, and prevent it from controlling Al-Aqsa Mosque."

Since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, there have been numerous attempts by extremist Jewish groups to destroy Al-Aqsa.

In 1969, a man described by Israeli authorities as a "lunatic" tried to burn the mosque, but worshippers quickly extinguished the fire.

In the last 15 years, another extremist group began digging beneath Al-Aqsa Mosque to prove their claim that the second Jewish temple is situated in the same place. Although these attempts failed, Palestinians have warned that the digging operations threatened the mosque's foundations.

In October 1990, the Guardians of the Temple Mount issued a statement announcing their intention to march towards Al-Aqsa in celebration of a Jewish festival and called for "the liberation of the Temple Mount (Al-Aqsa Mosque's site) from the hands of Arabs."

Palestinian Muslims rushed to defend the mosque on the day of the march, which ended in a massacre when the Israeli army fired on the worshippers, killing 18 people and wounding hundreds.

Most recently, ultra-orthodox Jewish groups, particularly the Guardians, have been provoking Muslims by distributing pictures of Jerusalem in which Al-Aqsa is replaced by a picture of the third temple.

Israel's efforts to control Al-Aqsa mosque and other Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem are part of a wider plan to completely end Palestinian presence in the area. Other attempts have included increasing Jewish settlements in the city and cancelling Palestinian identity cards.

Star witness poisons ties

Former Iranian President Abul-Hassan Bani Sadr alleged in testimony before a Berlin court that Iran's religious leader, Ali Khamenei, signed a written order authorising the murder of four Kurdish opposition figures in Berlin in 1992. On the second day of his testimony, last week, he told the court that Khamenei gave the order for the murder of the Kurdish politicians and subsequently discussed details of the plan with Iranian President Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Bani Sadr, Iran's first president after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, was ousted from power in June 1981, following a dispute with the late Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini. He has been living in exile in Paris ever since.

The former president, an active opposition figure since his ousting, arrived in Berlin amid tight security measures to give testimony against an Iranian and three Lebanese charged in the case. Before leaving France for Germany, he alleged that two Iranian squads were about to murder him.

Bani Sadr's testimony in the killing of Iranian Kurdish leader Sadegh Chamikandi and three others in an armed attack at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in 1992 dealt a blow to recent attempts to improve relations between Iran and Germany.

The German government has been leading the European drive to maintain a "critical dialogue" with Iran despite intense pressure from the United States to sever diplomatic and trade relations with Tehran. However, with the current trial under way, Berlin found itself under pressure at home as well. Leading members of Germany's main opposition Democratic Socialist Party and the Green Party also called upon the government to sever its ties with Tehran if Bani Sadr's allegations proved to be true.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said he would take "a very careful look" at Bani Sadr's testimony. Only the government can decide whether there is a need to take action, he added. Kinkel said he was strictly opposed to premature conclusions or prejudice in any form. "Of course this is something

that has to have significance in terms of the way in which we shape our relations with Iran," he said.

On its part, the Iranian government reacted angrily to Bani Sadr's testimony in Berlin and the protection he received from the German authorities. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said, "Bani Sadr's lack of credibility is known to all." He called Bani Sadr's testimony "baseless" and added: "He lost his credit even among his own clique of anti-revolutionaries and nobody listens to him."

A Tehran English daily, *Iran News*, sharply criticised the German judicial system, stating: "Could the German judicial system find a less poisonous biased star witness against the leaders of the Islamic Republic? Perhaps the intention was to make a laughing stock out of the German judicial system."

The paper added: "He [Bani Sadr] has recently been financially troubled, so he surely could use some Deutsch marks in exchange for his services as a witness, plus a fistful of dollars from CIA agents for

helping them accuse Iran of international terrorism."

Bani Sadr has skillfully used his high-profile visit to Germany to air numerous accusations against the Iranian regime and to call upon European countries to sever their trade ties with Tehran. He told the news agency Reuters that at least 60 dissidents had been killed on the orders of the Iranian government in the last 16 years, and warned there would be more bloodshed.

"There will be more assassinations if Western countries do not act with resolve and with greater transparency against the regime," he said. "Don't give the mullahs any new credit," he added. Bani Sadr has even gone as far as accusing German intelligence of establishing strong ties with the Iranian secret service.

The case of the murdered four Kurdish politicians in Berlin has created tension in relations between Iran and Germany since it was revealed in March this year. The German Federal Prosecutor Bruno Jost has named the Iranian secret service, Vevak, as

the masterminds of the murders, and an arrest warrant was issued for Iranian information minister and intelligence boss Ali Fallahjani.

Iran reacted angrily to the accusation at that time and has put pressure on the German authorities to cancel the arrest warrant. Suspicions that the German authorities might have given in to Tehran were raised after the German secret service coordinator, Ben Schmidbauer, succeeded in mediating between Israel and Iranian-backed Hizbullah to reach an agreement over the exchange of the remains of soldiers killed in fighting between the two sides.

During negotiations for the swap deal, Schmidbauer held extensive meetings with Fallahjani, raising fears that Bonn was softening its position towards Tehran. But German officials insisted that talks between the two sides concentrated on "humanitarian issues" only.

Bani Sadr will be questioned again by the state court on 5 September, probably adding more fuel to the latest crisis in German-Iranian relations.

Stalled peace, cold war

Despite the sabre rattling, the talk of missiles and anti-missile missiles, everyone, including Israel, has a lot to lose by a new Middle East war. The stalled peace process is unlikely to deteriorate into a hot war, writes Galal Nassar

Even before Benjamin Netanyahu became Israel's prime minister in June, the shadow of war hovered over the region. As negotiations between Israel and Syria bogged down, the US and Egypt sought ways to extricate them from their impasse.

US coordinator of the peace process, Dennis Ross, flew to the region at the end of last month in the hope of finding an opening through which he could resume his shuttle diplomacy in the region. He returned home when he discovered that he would have to begin again at point zero. Ross's plan was to test out Netanyahu's "Lebanon first" option, only to meet with Hafez Al-Assad's counter-demand for the "Golan first."

Assad reiterated this demand in an international press conference at Ras El-Tin Palace in Alexandria this month when he said that his position was founded upon the insistence of the Lebanese government and people that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in the peace process are inseparable. Earlier in the month, Assad declared before a military parade marking the 51st anniversary of the foundation of the Syrian army that occupied Arab territories would be liberated.

Pressures mounted on Syria from all sides to accept the Israeli solutions that would simultaneously reduce its regional influence by disassociating the Lebanese and Syrian tracks and restrain the Hizbullah-led Lebanese resistance which is backed by Syria and Iran. The strongest pressure Syria faces is the Turkish-Israeli security agreement. In return for concluding this defence agreement that directly targets Syrian strategic interests, Israel reportedly would bombard the training bases of the anti-Turkey Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Lebanon, sparing Turkish-Arab relations further acrimony. At the same time, Damascus, Aleppo and Latakia suffered a series of explosions, one of which was meant to assassinate PKK leader Abdullah Oglan, and for which Turkey declared responsibility. These events came fast in the wake of Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" operation in Lebanon, intended to provoke the Syrian forces stationed there and to demonstrate the futility of Syria's military presence in safeguarding Lebanon's security.

The intensity of these pressures must be seen against the background of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement and the heady pace of normalisation between the two countries, all of which is intended to make Syria feel the noose tightening.

As pressures mount on Syria, Netanyahu grows increasingly intransigent. He refused to withdraw from the Golan and proposed partial solutions for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from South Lebanon in return for Syria ending its support for Hizbullah.

As negotiations ground to a halt, the Clinton administration called for intensifying pressure on Syria as a precondition for resuming Israeli conditions, scoring a victory for Clinton's foreign policy ahead of the American presidential elections.

Syria was thus subjected to renewed US economic sanctions recently on the grounds that it supports Hizbullah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the PKK, all of which are ranked as terrorist organisations by the US administration. Washington applied the same logic in renewing sanctions against Iran and Libya, in the hopes that this would boost Clinton's prospects for a second term of office.

Over the past few weeks, Syria and Israel have become increasingly entrenched in their positions. Following a tour of several Arab countries, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharras restated Syria's position. He announced that Syria would only resume negotiations with Israel if Tel Aviv declared its commitment to the principle of "land-for-peace" and to the resolutions of the Madrid conference which are founded upon UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 calling upon Israel to withdraw from the Arab territories it occupied since 1967. He said, "Israel is dragging its feet in the peace process and undermining its foundations, which suggests that Netanyahu does not want peace." Meanwhile, in an interview on Israeli radio, Netanyahu said that his government would not be constrained by any oral pledges the former Labour government committed itself to.

This diplomatic posturing has been mirrored by statements by the two countries' respective military officials. Syrian Chief of Staff General Hikmat Al-Shahabi announced that the military option is on the table among other options open to Damascus in its pursuit of a just peace. Syria has had to resort to the option of armed confrontation in the past in order to combat Israeli aggression on Arab territory. He stressed that Syria will not let Israel obtain through a negotiated settlement what it was unable to obtain through war and territorial aggression. At the same time, Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, in explicitly menacing tones, said that Israel would strike all forces that are stationed in South Lebanon in response to any attacks against northern Israel and Israeli forces deployed in the so-called security zone.

The verbal sabre-rattling increased in intensity



Assad



Netanyahu



A military helicopter flies over Israeli tanks during army manoeuvres in the Golan Heights in June. Netanyahu was recently compared to Adolf Hitler in a Syrian newspaper (photo: AP)

when Netanyahu's threats against Lebanon virtually convinced Syria that war between Israel and Syria was imminent. Damascus warned Tel Aviv that Israel would suffer a massive defeat in the event of a military confrontation with the Arabs and that the Arabs were fully capable of repelling any Israeli aggression. Syria sources say that Israel is "sounding its war drums again" in its attempt to put an end to the peace process. Israel should "think a thousand times" before it embarks on an adventure against an Arab nation, particularly Syria, Syrian reports said.

The official Syrian press has mounted an all-out campaign against Israel. *Tahrir* wrote, "War between Syria and Israel is not a remote possibility. We call upon the international community to restrain Netanyahu." *Al-Thawra* wrote, "Netanyahu is stirring up a maniacal wind that feeds the grip of tension and escalates the language of aggression." *Al-Baath* accused Israel of "seeking to ignite new warfare in the region."

For its part, Israeli television announced that Syria has been conducting tests on its delivery systems for its long-range Scud-C missiles. It added that these missiles, which have a range of 600km (373 miles) and can be equipped with a 500kg explosive charge or chemical or biological warheads, are capable of striking the most densely populated cities in Israel. The tests have caused anxiety among Israeli military officials. Israeli television channel two's military correspondent reported, "The Syrian missile tests have provoked tension across the lines of contiguity between the two countries." Also, Ze'ef Manz, the director of the Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, said, "The prospects of war with Israel have become increasingly tangible following the election of Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel." According to Israeli intelligence reports published in *Maariv*, Syria possesses at least 20 mobile launchers for its Scud-C missiles and an arsenal of hundreds of missiles of different models. The Syrians have many enemies, the report continues, particularly Iraq and Turkey. However, the report said, "they may also want to give us the message that they will not stand by if we send in military reinforcements to South Lebanon." It adds that 35,000 Syrian forces are stationed in Lebanon, while the Israeli army occupies a border zone of 850 square kilometres in the South.

As a response, in what was obviously a display of muscle, Israel conducted the first trial test of its

Hetz-2 ground-to-ground anti-missile missiles since they were obtained by the Israeli army. The test was conducted in an Israeli base located near the southern coast of Israel under simulated war conditions. *Al-Ahram Weekly* learned that this test is to be followed by three more tests as part of Israel's programme to put in place an anti-missile defence network by the end of this century. This network would be able to defend Israel against the Chinese, North Korean and Soviet long-range missiles owned by countries in the Arab world by the end of this century, as well as against the long-range Karyusha rockets which Hizbullah may have obtained and which are capable of striking the entire area of Galilee. The network, which began to be implemented eight years ago, is heavily financed by the US. Israel will only pay 28 per cent of its estimated cost of \$322 million.

It is in this context that the ramifications of the statement made last week by General Eytan Ben Eliah, the commander of the Israeli air force, can be understood. He announced that, "In the very near future, Israel will be directly linked to American intelligence satellites, giving it immediate access to information in the event of a missile attack." He added that Israel would soon be making technical modifications on its radar warning devices which have up to now relied on signals relayed via Washington.

Israel has also accused Syria of escalating the war of words in its bid to eschew dialogue over Israel's "Lebanon first" proposal and appealed to the US to alleviate tensions. Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy announced that his government does not wish to maintain relations with Syria at the current level, which he described as wrong and dangerous, and he called upon officials in Damascus to reduce the level of tensions between the two countries. He added that the Syrian missile tests were signals of war and said, "If Syria wants peace, then it should not speak the language of missiles and arms."

Following a meeting held by the defence and foreign affairs committees of the Israeli Knesset in response to the alleged Syrian missile tests, Netanyahu announced that "there are no new strategic factors in the Syrian-Israeli equation." He added, "Syria has been intent on arming itself with Scud missiles. All it is doing now is making the transition from buying them to manufacturing them itself. But

they are the same missiles with the same capacities." Netanyahu also said that he is waiting for Syria to respond to his offer that he relayed to Damascus via Washington to resume negotiations at the Wye Plantation in Maryland. These negotiations, he said, would be open to the discussion of any subject either side wishes to bring up.

The mystery behind the build-up in tension between the two countries can be traced to deliberate leaks to the press that Israel will have completed the formulation of an actual plan for war with Syria within a few months and that this plan will be put into effect in the event of any changes in the region that may prove detrimental to Israel. According to these reports, the plan is a response to intelligence Israel has received concerning a purported alliance between Syria and Iran against Israel and will rely on four general courses of action:

1- To strike and paralyse Syrian air defence systems within 48 hours, permitting Israeli control over Syrian air space.

2- To neutralise Syria's fighter planes by enhancing Israel's anti-aircraft systems and by subjecting any aircraft to intensive anti-aircraft fire before they can cross the borders.

3- As Golan is considered a strategic zone belonging to Israel, military operations will be conducted beyond that zone.

4- To use its early warning systems to neutralise Syrian missiles before they arrive inside Israel.

The plan also apparently contains approximately 300 considerations of the various scenarios that could evolve on the Syrian front.

In light of these leaks, military advisers of the National Security Agency in Washington compiled a report in which they predicted a military confrontation if the climate in the region continues at its current level of tension, particularly if news of this report reached other countries in the region. The report, intended as advice to Israel, said "Any escalation with the Arab countries will embroil Israel in a war that will encroach into Israel. Israel will be more on the defence than on the offence. The Arab countries now possess advanced long-range missiles that can reach Israel within moments of the outbreak of any new war in the region and Israeli losses will be far greater than those suffered by the Arab countries. If Israel decided to wage war against a single Arab country, the other Arab countries will take some military measures to

deter the Israeli assault."

The report also warned that any new engagements will take place primarily inside Israel and that if Israel attempts to have recourse to the use of nuclear weapons, it will bring as much harm to itself as to the Arabs, thus limiting its potential for use of these weapons. It advised Israel to proceed with extreme caution in southern Lebanon so as to avert any major clashes with Syria, Iran or other countries. It added that Egypt, among all the Arab countries, posed the greatest risk to Israeli security. It is close, it can be quick to act and it has great military capabilities. The report said that Egyptians have been very astute in the way they have concluded military agreements with numerous countries in the world, and that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is a man of peace, but he can become a man of war if the situation calls for it.

Such reports force Israel to face the fact that, although it can threaten the Arab world with its arsenal of nuclear and traditional weapons, the Arab countries have the capacity to threaten back.

The former Israeli air force commander Herzl Bodinger, in a press conference held last month on the occasion of his retirement, said, "For the first time since 1948 the Arab countries have come to possess the capacity to strike anywhere inside Israel. If a full-scale war broke out, Israel will be showered with hundreds of ground-to-ground missiles. That Egypt and Syria are now among those countries with the capacity to strike at targets inside Israel is very disturbing to the Israeli defence forces." In addition, a top-secret Israeli intelligence report obtained by the *Weekly* said that according to projections based on future arms purchasing agreements and the domestic production of ballistic missiles, there will be no less than 3,000 ballistic missiles in the Middle East within the next 10 years.

Against this background, how probable is a military confrontation between Syria and Israel? The short-term strategy of both countries excludes a full-scale war, although it is possible that they might engage in tactical manoeuvres that avert the potential of a direct clash. Rather than operations on the scale of "Grapes of Wrath," the purpose of these operations would be to force acquiescence or more concessions in the peace process. This is the context in which we should see the renewed build-up in the region of deterrent weaponry.

The close observer of Israeli politics will note that Israel does indeed want to sign a peace agreement with Syria, but on its own terms. Israel is aware that it has more to gain from peace, particularly as it aspires to establish strong economic ties with the rest of the region. This will remain out of reach as long as the borders of any Arab country, near or far, remain closed to it. Perhaps this explains why Netanyahu was perturbed by Mubarak's statement last Thursday when he intimated that he was considering cancelling the economic summit due to be held in Cairo in November if there is no tangible progress in the peace process. The fact that Netanyahu hurried to dispatch David Levy, his foreign minister, to Egypt this week is a tacit recognition that Egyptian diplomacy was able to back him into a corner.

As for the purported plan to direct a military strike at Syria, this, too, can be understood as a way to induce Assad to parley with Netanyahu. This plan, which is believed to have been intentionally leaked by an Israeli security agency, is very inaccurate in its assessments of Syrian military capabilities.

According to the last edition of *Eastern Mediterranean*, a magazine specialising in defence issues published in the UK, the Syrian air force is capable of launching a lethal raid on Israel and Syrian aircraft, particularly its Su-24 planes, have the capacity to penetrate Israel and inflict severe damage on Israeli targets in Tel Aviv. Furthermore, Syria has more than purely tactical air capabilities and, although it would pay a heavy price for striking against Israel, its strikes would be very destructive to Israel, particularly if Syria used non-conventional weapons.

If Israel is unable to embark on or sustain such a war, the same applies to Syria if it is not guaranteed the support of other Arab countries, and particularly if it does not have on its side the active participation of Egypt. This is why Syrian intimations of war have never mentioned Syria alone, but have engaged the rhetoric of collective Arab action in the defence of Arab territories. In so doing, it is taking advantage of the climate established by the Arab summit meeting in Cairo last June. It is to be expected that Syria will urge other Arab countries to reassess their relations with Israel and to support Lebanese and Syrian demands and to declare their positions openly. This explains Sharras's recent tour of some Arab capitals.

In addition to the above considerations, the present international order and the current conflict between the US and Europe render the international climate inimical to an armed confrontation in the Middle East.

Korean miracle pales

South Korean President Kim Young Sam's violent crackdown on demonstrating students may reflect a loss of control over the nation's economic and political future, writes **Faiza Rady**



Former President Chun Doo-Hwan was sentenced to death and Roh Tae-Woo received 22 years (photo: AP)

A nine-day violent crackdown by riot police against student demonstrators at South Korea's Yonsei University ended on 22 August. President Kim Young Sam branded the young people as "revolutionary urban guerrillas advocating communism", and labelled the Federation of Student Councils, the group which had organised the protest rallies, as "anti-unification, anti-democratic and anti-state".

The students were demanding unification with North Korea, the withdrawal of some 35,000 US troops stationed in South Korea, the dismantling of the huge American bases scattered all over the country and a reversal of Kim's "US puppet policies". In response, Kim claimed that the students' line was identical to North Korea's. "Their action must be condemned," he said. "Such pro-North Korean violence will be sternly punished."

And punish them he did. In the strongest suppression of student activism in South Korea's history, police arrested some 5,715 "urban guerrillas" and "pro-North Korean student agents and stooges", after deploying a 20,000-strong riot police contingent in Seoul, as well as on the route leading to Pannunjon — the village demarcating the border with North Korea, and around the "dangerously violent" but otherwise prestigious Yonsei University. Heavy security was in evidence in much of Seoul, especially around the US Embassy. Police frequently stopped young pedestrians and searched their bags, the Associated Press reported. And in a building near the city centre, police seized a cache of 500 firebombs and dozens of metal pipes — presumably stockpiled by the students.

During the final police raid, on 22 August, army helicopters dropped troops from the air while ground forces stormed the university campus, destroying makeshift barricades with high-powered bulldozers. "Witnesses said that 12 helicopters and several armed vehicles fired tear gas as thousands of helmeted combat policemen raided the university, where some 6,000 students had gathered", reported *The Herald Tribune*. "Students fought back, beating the police with heavy metal pipes and throwing stones and firebombs. Stones, bricks and broken glass littered the main campus thoroughfare, where burned remains of tyres, desks and chairs set on fire by the students were left to smoulder. More than one thousand students and riot policemen were injured during the assault."

As Seoul's jails filled with students, Pyongyang — the North Korean capital — condemned the crackdown. "If they [the Kim government] truly want to negotiate with the North, they must stop the repression and allow free discussion of reunification," said a statement carried by the official media. Meanwhile, Ryu Se-Hong and To Jong-Hwa, two students who had flown to Pyongyang via Berlin to demonstrate the South Korean students' solidarity with the North, denounced the Seoul government for "ruthlessly violating human rights". The students said that the Kim administration should "stop walking away [from reunification] and detaining the largest number of people ever in history and immediately release the students, who had fought a just fight." In London, the human rights group Amnesty International expressed concern that police might further mistreat detained students.

Some South Korean intellectuals accuse Kim of attacking the students in an effort to woo conservatives, whose votes went to independents or opposition candidates in last May's parliamentary elections. "The harshness of the crackdown reflects the conservative line of Kim's administration, which saw its power base gradually erode this year with his reform drive tapering off," said Lee Phil-Sang, a political science professor at Korea University. And the liberal opposition party, the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP), denounced the government's right-wing approach to the unification question. "Kim's government has followed past authoritarian regimes by excluding liberals in formulating its unification policy," said Park Hong-Yup, an NCNP spokesperson. The Kim administration's anachronistic stand on the North/South question is illustrated by a bizarre recent incident. On 20 August, South Korean novelist Kim Hah-ki was arrested for breaking the national security law which prohibits any unauthorised contact with the Communists in the North. Kim, who had mistakenly crossed the border in a drunken stupor, was duly returned by Pyongyang and had then to

apologise to the government for his "grave crime". Recent events indicate that Kim is intent on a demonstration of power on all fronts: the police-student battles coincided with South Korea's annual war games, reported to be the most obvious flexing of military might to date, assisted, as always, by the US army.

Then, on 21 August, the day before the final crackdown on the students, Seoul residents were warned by loudspeakers that there was a heightened probability of North Korean "provocation" because of the communist state's recent economic problems, which have made it dependent on foreign aid. A questionable scenario to say the least, which *The Guardian* described as "most unlikely". Air raid sirens blared at 11am as two F-16 and two F-4 jet fighters appeared out of the northern skies, swooped over the capital and headed back north. Nationwide, 24 other jets simulated similar lightning raids on 37 cities, ostensibly to "boost the nation's security awareness", according to Cho Woon-Gil, the civil defence headquarters director. Pyongyang accused the South of using intimidation tactics by staging a "frantic war gamble and creating an atmosphere of real war. Linking behind this is a sinister intention to call out police, government officials and the army to repress pro-unification patriotic forces," commented the North Korean Central News Agency.

This fuelling of renewed unease and hostility towards the Communist regime was perhaps undertaken with the aim of distracting the people from South Korea's inner turmoil.

After five decades of US-backed and installed dictatorships, Kim Young Sam, the first democratically elected South Korean president, faces tremendous opposition — over and beyond last week's student protest. "His domestic policies of reform have alienated his own supporters, who are turning against him. He is hemmed in by corruption allegations that threaten to engulf the entire political class. His foreign policies have been ineffectual. He is deeply unpopular," assessed *The Economist*.

Unlike his predecessors, who established a capitalist economy while strictly protecting the national industrial base through tariffs and foreign in-

vestment restrictions, Kim has started to deregulate, a requirement imposed by South Korea's application to join the prestigious Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Despite being in the US zone of influence since its inception in 1945, South Korea has maintained one of the world's most protected markets — a plausible reason for its economic success story and strong growth rate, estimated at 7.7 per cent this year. In 1993, South Korea ranked as the first naval producer worldwide with a 39 per cent share of the global market; it was the fifth manufacturer of textiles, petrochemicals, electronics, steel products and motors. And there are other indications of prosperity: the average lifespan increased from 59.9 years in 1960 to 70.4 years in 1993, and illiteracy has been practically eradicated.

Under the Kim administration, however, the requirements of globalisation — along with increasing deregulation — have already changed the picture. Although unemployment is still low, economists predict that it is bound to increase because of computerisation and the relatively high cost of Korean labour. Many South Korean multinationals have already relocated to countries with cheaper labour pools. Samsung, for example, has invested \$500 million to produce semi-conductors and refrigerators in Suzhou, China. Lucky Goldstar has similarly invested heavily in local Chinese production and sales. And Samsung, Goldstar and Daewoo have all opened subsidiaries in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, where labour costs are considerably cheaper. In this unprotected and rapidly deregulated economy, South Korean workers will eventually become "redundant" as the saying goes — unable to compete against blind-market forces over which they have no control.

The loss of control over the country's economic — and political — future may have been at the crux of last week's demonstrations at Yonsei University. A loss of national control over the economy and a loss of political control to the US forces that impose their own agenda on compliant "puppet" politicians. When the protesting students chanted for "socialism" and "reunification", they were demanding to regain control over their destiny.

Cypriot crossroads

The clashes in the UN buffer zone in Cyprus underlined the urgent need to resolve the conflict, reports **Doaa El-Bay**

By crossing the United Nations buffer zone separating the Turkish and Greek parts of Cyprus earlier this month, Greek Cypriot bikers aimed at protesting against the division of their island. The act triggered clashes between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots. It was a grim reminder that the conflict in Cyprus is still unresolved.

Greek Cypriot bikers protesting the Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus stormed into the UN buffer zone throwing stones at Turkish troops. Clashes took place when Turkish troops responded with gunfire and stones. These clashes, described as the worst outbreak of violence since the division of the island in 1974, left two Greek Cypriots dead and a dozen people injured from both sides.

Turkey occupied the northern third of Cyprus in response to a coup aimed at uniting the island with Greece. Turkish Cypriots declared their own state nine years later, but it was only recognised by Ankara. Although Cyprus has been an independent island since 1960, it has never been able to resolve the conflict between the 600,000 Greek Cypriots and the 150,000 Turkish Cypriots.

Each community blamed the clashes on the other. Nalan Kazazoglu, the press councillor at the Turkish Embassy in Cairo, blamed the bikers' problem on the Greek politicians and officials. "Instead of bringing them to reason, they expressed their support and even posed with the cyclists before the cameras although the intention of the bikers to cross the whole of Cyprus was known. The young bikers have been the victims of the irresponsible provocation by the Greek and Cypriot officials." She believed that clashes in Cyprus could be prevented in the future if both communities respect the rights of the other.

Kazazoglu said that the Turkish government and the government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) believe that negotiation is the only way to find a solution. "In the present situation, this is the only reasonable thing to do," she added. Kazazoglu stressed that this is not the time for accusing any government or organisation but of reason and calmness. "Accusations and provocation could only worsen the situation. The two communities in Cyprus should come together and find the best solution," she said. She was referring to the Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash's proposal to meet Cypriot President Glafos Clerides to resolve the Cypriot problem.

The Greek Cypriots blamed the violence on the Turkish troops. Yorgos Coutousimis, the press councillor at the Greek Embassy in Cairo, said that the latest events can be attributed to the barbaric behaviour of the Turkish occupation troops and the mercenary members of the [Turkish extremist] Grey Wolves Group who turned a peaceful march by unarmed bikers to a bloody protest.

He said that for negotiations between Denktash and Clerides to bear fruit, "there must be an agreement on the basic principles underlined by the UN to resolve the Cypriot problem". He said that Clerides is not against talks with Denktash, but is trying to set the stage that would guarantee the success of the negotiations.

The government of Cyprus requests the support of the international community to seek a just, viable and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem that would end the Turkish occupation and restore the human rights and basic freedoms of all Cypriots.

The US described the events in Cyprus as tragic. The State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said that these events underscore once again the need to reach a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus. "We intend to continue our efforts to seek common ground between the two communities and achieve a lasting agreement on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation that will enable all Cypriots to live together in a peaceful and prosperous Cyprus."

Russia called for indirect talks between Denktash and Clerides as soon as possible. The Russian permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Sergei Lavrov, said indirect talks should be initiated by the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Cyprus, Ham Sam-Joo. The UN condemned both sides and urged them to renounce violence. The Security Council president, Antonios Rittell, called on both sides to prevent provocative acts and to ensure full respect of the UN buffer zone. He pointed to the need for a peaceful and durable political solution of the Cyprus problem. The UN's mission is not easy, but at least its mediation is acceptable by both communities.

Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots are backing the mission of good offices of UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali and other countries to bring the two communities together in order to start dialogue and believe that a peaceful and just solution can only be reached by negotiations. "The UN can play a very active role in coordinating the other parties' initiatives to resolve the Cypriot problem," Coutousimis said. He named the US and the European Community as possible mediators.

Coutousimis regarded the United States' role as vital for maintaining security in Cyprus. "It is obvious that the Cypriot problem can explode at any time, and the best way to avoid an explosion is to find a quick solution," he said. He predicted that the solution will not come overnight, but can be reached after the US presidential elections in November.

Concerning the role of the European Community, Coutousimis said that the EU can play an important role in solving the problem in Cyprus. As the EU accepts Cyprus' request for membership, it is called to prove the interest shown by its officials in finding a solution to a mainly European problem.

The Turkish Cypriots agree with the Greeks on the need for a major American role in resolving the Cypriot crisis after the US presidential elections. "Although there is a strong Greek lobby in the US, I do not think the US government will take a new or different attitude concerning the Cyprus issue before the elections," Kazazoglu said. She ruled out a possible EU role, "except in the framework of the UN mission of good offices" because the EU favours the application of the Greek-Cypriot side to EU membership. "The countries of the EU, like the Greek Cypriots, have acted as if there is only one state and one community in Cyprus. With this attitude Europe backed the Greek side, and willingly or unwillingly this attitude has worsened the situation in the island," she said.

Chrysanthemum and crescent

Why has Japan chosen to acquire a more palpable presence in the Middle East as part of its global strategy, wonders **Gamal Nkrumah**

Japan, more than any other country in the world, can afford to have a rewarding foreign policy — it has a gross domestic product of \$5.1 trillion and a GDP per capita of \$40,500. The US, in comparison, has a GDP per capita of \$28,000. Still, Japan's political prowess on the international arena has always been in question. Why?

Do not be fooled by Japan's forbidding façade. Traditionally, the problem with Japan's post-World War II foreign policy was not the Japanese wallet, but the Japanese will to play a more assertive role internationally. For all its economic might, Japan is obliged to rely almost entirely on the United States for its defence and security needs. It foots the bill, but America calls the shots. Japan is also utterly dependent on the volatile Middle Eastern oil markets to meet its energy needs.

For all its riches, Japan is energy poor, and the nation's unquenchable thirst for oil lies at the heart of its relations with the Middle East. Japan accounts for 70 per cent of Asia's oil imports and imports 80 per cent of its energy needs. Notwithstanding the impressive success of fuel conservation campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, Japan has a \$50 billion annual oil import bill.

Last week, Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda visited Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Israel and met with leaders of the Palestinian self-rule authority. Ikeda stopped at the headquarters of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

(UNDOF) in Syria. He reiterated Japan's position of urging Israel to accept the "land-for-peace" concept as the basis for peace and announced the extension of Japan's grant-in-aid to the Palestinian Authority. Japan is one of the Palestinians' major benefactors. Through the Japan-Palestine Development Fund and other international organisations, Japan provides some \$176 million in aid to the Palestinians. Direct Japanese cash aid to the Palestinians amounts to some \$42 million — a total bill of nearly \$220 million.

In the past, the Japanese role in the Middle East peace process amounted to providing succour to the crushed Palestinian refugees and, more recently, to the cash-strapped Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

But he has long appreciated Japan's invaluable contributions to the UN's peacekeeping operations around the world, including in the Middle East.

Despite the fact that the cultural dynamics between Japan and the Middle East lack the depth that characterises Japanese ties to some other parts of the world, cultural attitudes have been shifting. Individuals like the Japanese ambassador to Egypt, Kunio Katsumi, one of a handful of Japanese Arabists, and Keiko Sakai, senior research officer at the Middle East Project of Tokyo's Institute of Developing Economies, who is stationed in Egypt, are hard at work to unveil the mystery surrounding Japan in the Arab world.

A former senior vice president of the influential Japan Foundation, Ambassador Katsumi has written about Arab-Japanese relations. In an interview with the *Weekly*, Katsumi concurred with Hatano that, "a mental distance" as distinct from the "geographical distance" still separates Arabs from Japan.

While retaining its position as the world's largest aid donor, Japan now has its own economic problems. Unemployment hit 3.5 per cent in June of this year, a grim reminder that full economic recovery still has some way to go. Nevertheless, the Japanese gross domestic product (GDP) grew at its fastest rate for nearly a quarter of a century. More important for the Middle East is the fact that Japanese firms are increasing investment overseas, despite the recent weakening of the yen against

the dollar and the persisting fears that the Japanese economy has still not fully recovered from the recession that cost it an estimated \$150 billion per year.

This week, Japanese firms surveyed by the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* daily said that they would increase capital investment overseas by 11.6 per cent in the year to March 1997. The figure exceeds the planned 8.9 per cent increase in domestic capital spending. The percentage of Japanese firms' total production undertaken overseas is expected to increase from 12.1 per cent in 1995-96 to an estimated 13.1 per cent in 1996-97. According to Reuters, this compares unfavourably with a 14.5 per cent rise for Japanese foreign investment and a 21.9 per cent rise in domestic spending in the fiscal year to March 1996. But the generally

buoyant figures are good news for Japan's foreign trading partners. "South-east Asia receives the lion's share, but the Middle East hopes to benefit as well," said Mohamed El-Sayed Selim, director of Cairo University's Centre for Asian Studies.

Meanwhile, Japan's trade surplus fell by 37.7 per cent in July 1996 as compared with the previous year, the Japanese Ministry of Finance announced last month. Crude oil purchases accounted for much of the 35.6 per cent rise in Japanese imports. In fact, crude oil imports increased by 48.9 per cent — very good news for Japan's trading partners in the Arab world.



Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda and PLO leader Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip (photo: Reuters)

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led to Lebed

The fragile cease-fire in Chechnya seems to hinge on how much the Chechen separatists trust General Lebed with their aspirations, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow



Chechen fighters celebrate their victory over the Russian occupying forces (photo: AP)

The Russians are not to be trusted. But President Yeltsin's special envoy to Chechnya, Alexander Lebed, is trustworthy. This seems to be the verdict of the Chechen people. Indeed, having rejected the so-called "Tatarstan option", their only hope of salvation now lies with Lebed. He alone appears to stand between them and Russian wrath. But what is the Tatarstan option?

Tatarstan is a landlocked autonomous Muslim republic in the heart of the Russian Federation. It is predominantly Muslim and populated by the Tatar descendants of the Golden Horde who ruled Russia for four centuries. Tatarstan is rich in oil, timber and many minerals and retains complete control of its many natural resources. Although it has coded all foreign affairs and defence matters to Russia, it has, through agreements with the Kremlin, preserved home rule.

The Tatars have learned to live with the Russians and have a voice in Russian politics. But efforts by the president of Tatarstan to mediate between fellow Muslims in Chechnya and the Russians to resolve their differences have been steadfastly rebuffed. The Chechens insist that unlike the Tatars, they have in the past refused to vote in Russian presidential elections — and shall not do so in the future.

In December 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent troops to crush the separatist movement following the Chechen declaration of sovereignty in 1991. Over 30,000 Chechen civilians perished in the ensuing bloodbath.

The Chechen people are unlikely to either forget or forgive the Russians for the atrocities committed by the occupying army against Chechen civilians.

Lebed contends that the negotiations are still on track. Lebed's success in resolving the Chechen crisis is crucial to his political future in Russia. His many enemies in the Kremlin would be delighted if he failed in Chechnya and are busy working for his demise. The Russian generals in Chechnya did their level best to thwart Lebed's plans in the latest cease-fire negotiations. The Chechen separatists, for their part, want to deal with Lebed only and nobody else. Lebed's foes are furious.

Chechen negotiators struggled last week to maintain and consolidate an informal cease-fire between Russia and the Chechen separatists. Lebed battled with his hard-line Kremlin opponents to impose the terms of the latest Russian-Chechen agreement.

"The differences are not so great as to block negotiations", a spokesman for Lebed, Alexander Barkhatov, said. But the informal cease-fire, reached last Saturday, did not prevent a mass exodus of Chechen civilians from the Chechen capital, Grozny. The city's residents dread a potential escalation of hostilities and further suffering under Russian occupation. They feel that the world is indifferent to their plight in deference to Russia's might. Russia's Federal Migration Service registered some 10,000 new refugees from Grozny in Chechnya and 5,000 in neigh-

bouring Ingushetia. Still, the outside world has done little to alleviate the Chechens' plight.

Although a truce has been in effect since 14 August, both sides have accused the other of violating the agreement. Top Chechen commander Arslan Maskhadov said that Russian soldiers had killed and tortured civilians, including women and children. The Chechens maintain that Russian warplanes bombed civilians leaving Grozny on 18 August, killing and wounding hundreds of people. And Russian forces claimed to have killed 40 Chechen fighters in a surprise assault on a bus and lorry southwest of Grozny on 19 August.

It is also alleged that Chechen freedom fighters repelled three columns of armoured vehicles trying to enter the Chechen capital on 17 August — reportedly killing 40 Russian soldiers during the fighting.

During his negotiations with the resistance, Lebed, who strongly criticised Yeltsin's waffling in the breakaway republic, agreed that the Russian army would retreat from Chechnya — except for the capital — in exchange for the Chechen retreat from Grozny. The agreement also included plans to establish a national congress representing the Chechen people, general elections and even talks on the future political status of the republic.

The Russian settlement efforts came on the heels of a successful Chechen offensive against the occupation forces in Grozny on 6 August, when the resistance regained control of most of central Grozny, including key strategic administrative buildings and checkpoints, formerly controlled by the Russian army. Consequently, Yeltsin immediately ordered Lebed to "free government buildings,

checkpoints and places where Russian units are posted". The Chechen attack on Grozny left more than 1,000 Russian soldiers dead or wounded and has once again humiliated the powerful and prestigious army of the former superpower.

It is in this context that Lebed, who supported Chechen independence during his presidential campaign, hopes to save Russia's face. The Lebed initiative was well received by the Chechen resistance.

Separatist leader Maskhadov respects Lebed. But the top Russian commander in Chechnya, General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, like many of the other Russian generals in Chechnya, refused to parley with Maskhadov. Tikhomirov and other Russian generals, propelled by their opposition to Lebed, are bent on ruining the chances for peace in Chechnya.

"Lebed made a good impression on us," said Maskhadov. "He actually wants to stop the war." Maskhadov, who leads the Chechen negotiating team, also expressed his confidence in Lebed as a credible negotiating partner. He insists that a single cease-fire monitoring commission include Lebed personally, together with Chechen rebel cadres and representatives from the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria.

Lebed's mission to Chechnya was, in fact, preceded by a power struggle with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and the presidential chief of staff, Anatoly Chubais. Lebed gained the upper hand when Yeltsin appointed him chief negotiator to Chechnya. Lebed had strongly criticised Chernomyrdin's former commission in Chechnya, which he described as having "made no advances either on the military, political or economic front." As far as Lebed was concerned, Chernomyrdin

had "not accomplished his mission".

Nevertheless, Lebed also seemed wary of his promotion to principal Chechnya trouble-shooter. "There are corridor intrigues and they want me to break my neck," he commented. Yet, a successful settlement of the Chechen conflict would consolidate Lebed's political power and could eventually propel him to the presidency — a possibility that seems very real given Yeltsin's fast failing health.

Besides Chernomyrdin and Chubais, Lebed's main political opponent on the Chechen question is revealed to be Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, officially in charge of the troops in Grozny. In an evident skirmish over the conflicting delegation of power between his ministry and the national security adviser, Kulikov embarrassed Lebed by asking him to report on the Chechen assault — despite the presence of tens of thousands of Russian soldiers and a contingent of intelligence officers in Chechnya. Lebed retorted at a press conference calling for Kulikov's resignation, accusing him of failure and incompetence. Apparently believing that Lebed had become too big for his boots, Yeltsin criticised him for his public stand, expressed his full confidence in Kulikov and asked him "to carry on the work".

In the end, the outcome of the power struggle between the hawkish Kulikov and the comparatively dovish Lebed may determine the fate of Chechnya. If Lebed continues to overstep his authority, ultimately threatening the ailing president's tenuous grip on power, Yeltsin may opt for Kulikov's military solution over Lebed's somewhat opportunistic peace initiative. Meanwhile, war and peace in Chechnya remains on hold.

Out of France

The five-month build-up to a Paris church stand-off ended in disaster for the immigrants, writes **Hosni Abdel-Rahim** from Paris

At dawn in the French capital, Paris, on 22 August, the armoured vehicles of the French riot police squad ominously hovered around Saint Bernard Church in District 18. Along with ambulances and doctors, the police closed in on the church which had become a symbol of African resistance. They were determined to evict some 350 Africans — including some on a hunger strike, from the church that gave them asylum. Ironically, the Africans were mainly Muslims and animists from Mali, Senegal and other Francophone African states. They had started their strike on 4 July.

The aim of this operation was to get these immigrants under obligatory medical observation in hospitals in Paris, declared French Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debré. Inside the church the Africans, half of them women and including 100 children, woke up in a panic when the police forces arrived. The trouble began a few months before. More than 300 immigrants, without residence papers after living in France for several years, began a protest movement on 18 March to obtain legal papers.

The immigrants occupied Saint Antoine Church in northeast Paris. Most of them have children born in France or live with people who have legal residence in the country.

The church authorities called the police on 22 March to clear the area by force. The Africans fled to a stadium or ended up living in an abandoned railroad building. Some were ordered deported. But a wide movement including unions, public figures and religious persons formed to collaborate with those who remained.

A mediation committee was also formed, including representatives of a number of humanitarian associations and prominent figures. The immigrants then fled to another church, Saint Bernard — long considered the natural and safe sanctuary of people of colour and other underdogs without rights. Church officials collaborated with the immigrants and refused any interference from the police to forcibly enter the church and expel the immigrants. They asked the government to negotiate with them to reach a humanitarian solution. When French Prime Minister Alain Juppé summoned nine of his ministers to try and break the impasse, the African immigrants' supporters saw red.

The refusal of the minister of interior to negotiate and his insistence on removing large numbers of illegal immigrants forcibly from France outraged many French people. An opinion poll showed that over 50 per cent of

French people sympathise with the African hunger strikers protesting the harsh French immigration laws. A strong wave of resentment swept through France. This movement included the main labour unions, among them the General Confederation of Labour, in addition to important cultural figures in France such as philosopher Pierre Bordier and Jean Derrida prominent scientists such as Leon Schwartzenberg and Albert Jacquard plus a number of public personalities and politicians such as former first lady Danielle Mitterrand, former French Minister of Culture Jack Lang, film actress Marina Vlady, the Archbishop of Paris Monsignor Gaillot, Dominique Vovnet, spokeswoman of the Green Party, and the well-known leftist Alain Krivine. They chained themselves to each other outside Saint Bernard Church last week and held the French flag in solidarity with the Africans.

The famous genetic scientist, Jacquard said, "When they ask me who are you, I'll say I do not have papers, send me to Bama!" Danielle Mitterrand went to the church on 16 August and warned that, "Humanity has been insulted here. The threat is confirmed for those who are here and for so many others who will be subjected to laws that should be modified." In addition, a large number of Communist and Socialist deputies voiced their indignation at the government. Lang said that he, explored President Jacques Chirac's government's lack of humanity.

The president of the Conference of French Bishops, Joseph Duval, said, "The position of the Catholic Church is clear: we respect the respect of people and families. The respect of individuals and families is threatened in this case." Duval was speaking on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church.

France's 3 million strong African community was outraged as well. Marianne Camara, a 27-year-old Malian said, "Blacks did not come to France uninvited. The French colonialism went to Africa and lured us here. Today, we do not accept to be deported."

The internationally acclaimed psychologist, Pierre Bordier, described the pro-African immigrant movement as one which was "collaborating closely with the immigrant communities whose inalienable human rights were violated. This may be the new beginning for a collaboration movement with all who are threatened by the mean policies of the Chirac government."

Amnesty International declared that the use of charter trips to deport immigrants is a se-

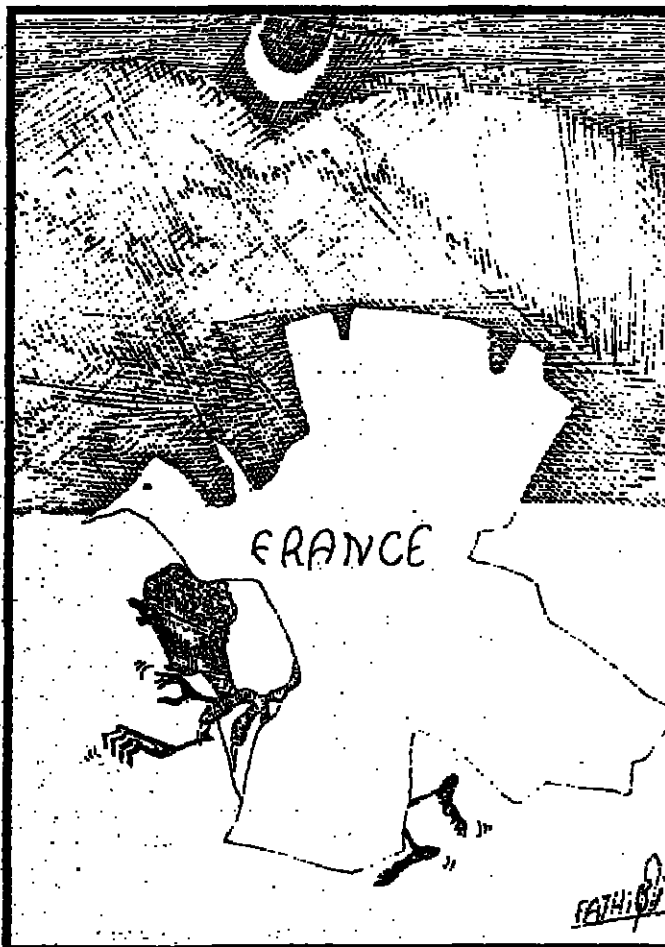
rious violation of human rights. The storm raised by Debré's policy towards immigrants is a ring in a long chain that started at the beginning of the 1990s under then Interior Minister Charles Pasqua. Any person who hides an illegal immigrant could be accused of committing a terrorist act. Children born in France do not have the automatic right to the French nationality. Immigrants who are married to French nationals are not allowed to get residency without certain complicated conditions.

The policies pursued by Pasqua and his successor Debré were intended to minimise immigration. Since Debré took charge, 22 charter trips have deported immigrants to their home countries regardless of their health conditions or the danger that may await them. Since January last year, 15,504 African and Arab immigrants were forcibly deported.

Some 80,000-120,000 foreigners settle down annually in France for various reasons such as marriage or family reunions. There are political forces in France that build their image on the basis of anti-immigration policies. Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front commented on the latest events by asking the minister of interior to take tougher measures against the immigrants and not respond to leftist pressures. Le Pen urged Debré to listen to the will of the "silent French majority".

But the French left stood firmly behind the immigrants. The leftist intellectuals called for a gathering of opposition forces to uphold human rights including the right to take political refuge in France. On 20 August, 10 left-wing parties urged President Jacques Chirac to order negotiations with the immigrants. Chirac, who was on holiday in the south of France, ignored the leftists' intervention. He had other plans in store for the immigrants.

A police operation took place on 23 August. Armed with clubs and shields and using tear gas, the French police stormed Saint Bernard Church and forcibly evacuated the Africans. This sad episode in French history may be the beginning of wider and fiercer confrontations between democratic, leftist and immigrant forces on one side and the ruling rightist forces on the other.



Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

Russia's only chance, lost

Miso Alkalaj

The sorry state of the Russian defense industry, once the pride of the former Soviet Union, is clearly evident in the Yakovlev Research Institute in Moscow. The only flying prototype of the YAK141 fighter sits forlorn in the backyard, covered with tarp. The aeroplane is a technological breakthrough: capable of vertical take-off from a special pad, it can fly at 1.4 times the speed of sound, carry as much armament as the American F-18 and land on a short runway. But there is no money to bring it to production and no buyers. So the remaining Yakovlev engineers work at make-believe tasks for eight hours a day and at 5pm the Institute is closed, electricity turned off to save money.

Before the breakup of the Soviet empire, armed forces spent 27 per cent of Soviet GNP. Now, the sorry remains of this body, once the largest armed force in the world, can't even pay for electricity. The largest Russian navy submarine base at Kola Peninsula almost suffered a major catastrophe in September 1995 when the local power distributor cut them off because of years of unpaid bills.

The Kola submarine base is more or less a junkyard of old and rusty Soviet nuclear vessels — these submarines can no longer operate, but their reactors are still quite hot and require constant cooling to keep them from melting down and discharging tons of highly radioactive material into the sea.

With external power gone, coolers were switched to backups — then it turned out that the Navy's own diesel generators have been so poorly maintained that most of them could not be even started, and those that did fire up soon broke down. Russian Armed Forces HQ quickly dispatched a unit of Spetsnaz (former Soviet, now Russian Special Forces) to the power distribution centre. At gunpoint, Kola controllers were forced to restore power to the Kola naval base and the catastrophe was averted.

Today, Russia's most successful export products are their nuclear warheads. We are not insinuating clandestine sales to countries like Iran, Libya, Pakistan, North Korea and others who seek to obtain nuclear weapons — such deals (if any) make only a minor contribution to Russia's GNP. Boris Yeltsin is selling his nuclear arsenal to the Americans.

As long as Russia remains a nuclear power, it retains its capability to do damage. With the country's political instability that might bring to power such extremists as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the USA will drop its "partner" like a rotten apple.

The three other nuclear powers, successors of the former Soviet Union — Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan — have already learned how short-lived American love is: as soon as their warheads were gone — either destroyed, turned over to Russia or divested of their plutonium which was shipped to the US — so were the Americans. Now these countries are left to their own political and economic devices.

Russia, a vast country with a wealth of natural resources, a well-educated population, and a diverse industrial base, continues to experience formidable difficulties in moving from its old centrally planned economy to a modern market economy. Russian President Boris Nikolajevich Yeltsin's government has made substantial strides in converting to a market economy since launching its economic reform programme in January 1992 by freezing nearly all prices, slashing defence spending, eliminating the old centralised distribution system, completing an ambitious privatisation programme, establishing private financial institutions, and decentralising foreign trade. Russia, however, has made little progress in a number of key areas that are needed to provide a solid foundation for the transition to a market economy. Financial stabilisation has remained elusive, with wide swings in monthly inflation rates. Only limited restructuring of industry has occurred so far because of a scarcity of investment funds and the failure of enterprise managers to make hard cost-cutting decisions.

According to Russian official data, GDP declined by 15 per cent in 1994 compared with a 12 per cent decline in 1993. Industrial output in 1994 fell 21 per cent with all major sectors taking a hit. Agricultural production in 1994 was down 9 per cent. Unemployment climbed to an estimated 6.6 million or about 7 percent of the work force by year-end 1994.

Official Russian sources claim that the real per capita income was up nearly 18 per cent in 1994 compared with 1993, in part because many Russians are working second jobs and that the recession in Russia is over. But entrepreneurs returning from this vast country tell a different story.

Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs estimated in 1990 that over 100 billion US dollars would be needed to restructure and upgrade piping which would enable Russia to bring its vast oil and natural gas reserves into the world market; this would give the country at least some stable source of foreign currency income. Yet there is little chance that such investment funds could be found. Russia does not have the money, and with the current oil glut Western countries see no interest in investing in this politically unstable country. Oil producers are hardly likely to finance the rise of a new supplier who would further reduce their prices.

Russia has numerous other natural resources — hydro-power, uranium, wood and various ores. Unfortunately, the decaying and sparse infrastructure makes most of them virtually inaccessible. A typical example: one Slovene company was offered a concession on over 40,000 square kilometers (15,450 square miles) of virgin forest — pine, spruce, larch and even oak; Slovenia has a sizeable furniture industry and interest in such a supply of raw materials was high. It soon turned out, however, that the investor would have to construct 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles) of railway before he could bring out the first log — there are no roads or railroads in the area. While investments in Russian natural resources meet with the problems of non-existent infrastructure, all investors face the perils of the large and unpredictable Russian bureaucracy. Official permission for investment activity is hard to obtain. Transfer of goods and funds across Russian borders is difficult and unpredictable at best. The government enforces new taxes without warning. Example: in January 1995, Russia imposed a 23 percent tax on foreign investment. This tax was repealed only after the USA threatened to freeze all economic aid to Russia.

Fleeing the foreigners seems to be the most popular economic activity in Russia. Entrepreneurs which cater to foreign investors and visitors seem to be the most profitable. McDonald's franchises sell burgers at up to \$20 apiece to tourists who cannot stomach Russian native food; a reasonably secure hotel in Moscow costs at least \$300 per day, while suites in the luxurious Hotel Moskva can go for over \$800. Safe taxis — ones that are guaranteed by the hotel not to rob the passengers — charge upwards of \$75 for a ride to the Sheremetyevo airport.

Security is a large business in Russia because the country is crime-ridden. Some analysts even speculate that Russia is actually run by crime syndicates, not by Boris Yeltsin and his government.

In Russia, entrepreneurs — local or foreign — are routinely expected to pay an average of 10 per cent of their gross income as *krishna*, protection money to the local gang; those who refuse get their premises fire-bombed or worse. Even with *krishna* paid, all persons of even moderate means are prime targets for kidnappers. Savvy entrepreneurs are never found in the premises at the address stated on their business card; the official set of the company is usually just a rented room with an answering machine and a fax — leave your message and you will be contacted.

The core of Russian Mafia gangs is made up of former KGB and GRU (army intelligence) operatives, professional soldiers, and police officials who have either been discharged or have by themselves decided to apply their specific talents to better paying jobs. All these people have had extensive weapons training; some had even participated in real wars they are past masters of conspiracy and terror.

Graft in the bungling bureaucracy, irrational taxes, *krishna*, poor infrastructure, expensive assets, dangerous environment — all of these add up to an expense that few entrepreneurs can afford. Consequently, only those foreigners who expect a large and fast return on their capital invest in Russia. Though police raids against the Mafia are widely publicised, Russian law enforcers seem to be making little headway against the tide of crime and corruption and the country remains one of the most dangerous places on earth. In this climate, economic stagnation is the best Russia can hope for.

To the average man on the street, all this goes to prove that socialism was not that bad. Russians queued up for bread during communist rule, as they do today, while privileged party officials drove around in Zai limousines and purchased luxuries from the West in special stores. Today, Mafia leaders ride in armored Mercedes or Rolls-Royce limousines, and though the stores with luxury goods are no longer reserved for the privileged, only the newly privileged have the money to buy there. At least communism guaranteed full employment and a miserable wage was better than no wage at all. Furthermore, in socialist days the Soviet Union was a world power — now it is reduced to Russia and a number of equally poor countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) who have to beg the West for help. In this climate, politicians who promise a return to "old glory" have no trouble finding voters.

The writer is head of the statistics centre at the Joseph Stefan Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Peace prices

Credit must be given where credit is due and, in this case, Netanyahu deserves a pat on the back for finally agreeing to meet with Arafat. His decision to meet the Palestinian leader came after roughly four months of stunts that have stymied efforts to move the peace process along in accordance to agreements struck in the past. Unfortunately, Netanyahu's policy shift did not result from an epiphanic realisation that peace, security and economic prosperity must be pursued in tandem. Nor was it due to the dawning that the current Likud administration is obliged to follow through with promises signed by the previous Labour government. Rather, it came from hitting Netanyahu where it hurt the most — the wallet.

Last Monday, President Mubarak threatened to cancel the Cairo Economic Summit, scheduled for November, if Israel did not get back on track with the peace process. Netanyahu's response was that of someone who has had his bluff called. He promised to resume talks with the Palestinians in the near future.

While this is a promising note in an otherwise troubling tale, one wonders why such threats must be made in the first place for pledges and promises to be worth more than the paper on which they are written. Any statesman would have realised that peace and security exist in a symbiotic relationship, and once realised, more likely than not will provide the necessary environment for economic prosperity on a regional level. Yet, Netanyahu opted for a stalemate, thinking that the Arabs would be passive and accept the fact that what Israel wants, Israel gets. He thought wrong.

Every country in the region, including the Palestinians who seek a homeland, and the Israeli's who would deny them this right, have a vested interest in peace. Netanyahu as a leader, versus a sound-bite cowboy, can ill afford to let his wallet and the rhetoric spouted by his extremist henchmen, dictate his policies. The price to be paid if peace is not realised by far exceeds that which will be due if Israel attempts to practice the same isolationist policies espoused and embraced by their Republican allies in Congress.

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A gathering in Ramallah

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses a hypothetical scenario that raises fundamental questions touching on the very essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict

Let us imagine a group of Israeli opposition parties coming together on a common platform that would include the recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state, the adoption of the principle of the exchange of land (including the Golan) for peace, the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Arab Palestine and a ban on new settlements. Taking the idea further, let us imagine that those parties try to solicit popular Arab support for their programme by holding a meeting in Ramallah, say, and inviting representatives of Arab opposition parties to join them in adopting these principles as a basis for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. This brings us to the question of whether any Arab opposition party would be willing to meet with their Israeli counterparts, however worthy the cause.

It is a question worth pondering at a time when the total impasse reached by the peace process entails a rethinking not only of the mechanisms devised for its implementation but of the peace strategy itself. The most critical issue raised by the question is whether the Arab parties would be willing to give up their traditional policy of boycotting Israel and all things Israeli, look, stock and barrel. When I put the question to a meeting of Egyptian strategists recently, it provoked a heated debate which remained inconclusive. Before going any further, we must be clear on what such a proposal would entail.

Arab popular forces outside state power structures continue to boycott all Israelis indiscriminately. For the boycott is, by its very

nature, indivisible. It cannot be applied selectively to one part of Israeli society and not another. Even within Arab state structures, there are those who believe the boycott to be a useful weapon that should not be abandoned as long as Israel does not respond to the requirements of an overall peace. If this sort of thinking was justified at the time of the 'dovish' Peres, it is even more justified now that Netanyahu is in power.

Actually, the Arab boycott of Israel is a practical manifestation of the more fundamental issue of Arab recognition of Israel at the grassroots level, where many believe that, given the lack of parity between the parties, the current peace process is unlikely to produce a stable peace. At best, they see it as offering only a temporary respite from protracted open conflict. According to this logic, the Arabs should not take irreversible steps towards normalisation, such as lifting the boycott, as this would jeopardise future opportunities to eliminate the Zionist threat. An act of solidarity between Arabs and Israelis at the grassroots level is therefore no ordinary issue, but comes up against a basic tenet of the Arab strategic thinking, which prevailed throughout the long confrontation with Israel.

On the other hand, the current political situation inside Israel is the weakest element in Netanyahu's overall strategy. Israel has been successful, particularly under the Rabin/Peres stewardship, in sowing dissent within Arab ranks by convincing each party that it stood to gain more by dealing separately with Israel than through collective Arab action. This goes

a long way towards explaining the lamentable lack of coordination that has marked the course of Arab negotiations with Israel since the Madrid conference. The Oslo negotiations were conducted secretly, the Jordanian-Israeli treaty was hammered out without the knowledge of the other Arab parties, and it took a Likud victory and Netanyahu's repudiation of the land-for-peace formula to bring about an Arab summit in a bid to re-establish some sort of common front.

Netanyahu alleges that he does not set preconditions for peace. But this is a misleading allegation, if only because occupation of territory is in itself the most important precondition by which Israel can impose its own agenda. The best way for the Arabs to offset the Israeli advantage is to act on forces within Israel who do not espouse the Netanyahu agenda of giving precedence to Israel's security over peace, even at the price of jeopardising Arab security, and peace.

Israel is unscrupulous when it comes to exacerbating inter-Arab contradictions; the Arabs should have no compunction about playing a similar game within Israel. This can be achieved by encouraging the peace camp in Israel and giving it concrete assurances that full normalisation is possible in exchange for an equitable peace that responds to legitimate Arab aspirations. The Arab strategy should not be limited to accepting the Netanyahu rationale of 'pragmatism', which boils down to addressing only the issues that threaten Israel's security.

Netanyahu believes that Arab diplomacy has

no other choice, but recent events belie this sanguine assumption. Cairo has recently threatened to call off the economic summit it is hosting next November if no progress is realised on the bilateral tracks with Syria and the Palestinians, while Arafat met with Peres last week in defiance of the established practice of not interfering in internal Israeli affairs. This logic can be taken to its ultimate conclusion with Arab popular forces responding positively to an invitation from their Israeli counterparts.

In this connection, it might be useful to recall the recent furor that met French philosopher Roger Garaudy's latest book, *The Founding Myths of Israeli Policy*, in which he presents strong evidence to suggest that the number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust was in reality far below the six million that is commonly accepted as an incontrovertible truth. So much so that any attempt to cast doubt on the accuracy of the figure, which constitutes an essential building block of Israel's legitimacy, is considered an act of anti-Semitism. Arab intellectuals were right to denounce the persecution to which Garaudy was subjected for daring to contest the figure. But on the occasion of a recent visit by Garaudy to Beirut, Damascus and Amman, a number of articles by Arab intellectuals questioned the wisdom of belittling the suffering of the Jews, on the grounds that Arab recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish fears is the best way of compelling Jews to recognise the legitimacy of Arab fears and defeat extremists like Netanyahu.

Time for a change of direction

The policies of the '70s and '80s are outdated today, and unequivocal support for Syria and Lebanon may well be the answer of the late '90s, writes Abdel-Khalek Farouk

The past months have been witness to a clear shift in Egyptian political and media discourse regarding the United States and American policy in the Middle East. Severe denunciation of the US's flagrant bias towards Israel has become a notable feature of political commentary across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, this change in perception and attitude has not as yet been reflected in a commensurate change in political behaviour.

The premise of a possible 'impartial' American role in the Arab-Israeli conflict has guided Egyptian diplomacy ever since Sadat. Since 1969, we can see an attempt to tip the strategic balance in US-Israeli and US-Egyptian relations in such a way as to sway the US into a playing a major role in rolling back the effects of Israel's victory in the June 1967 War, and achieve a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that maintains a minimum of Arab and Palestinian rights.

Two phases in Egyptian diplomacy, aimed at effecting a certain impact on the American strategy, can be identified. The first phase began with Sadat's 4 February 1971 initiative, followed by policies aimed at gaining a foothold in the list of US priorities (the expulsion of the Soviet experts, the kilometre 101 negotiations, etc.) then his visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and his well-known assertion that '99 per cent of the cards in the game are in the hands of the United States'. This policy resulted in the complete isolation of Egypt from the rest of the Arab world.

The second phase began in 1982. The new Egyptian leadership made efforts to contain the impact of Sadat's unrestrained policies and return Egypt to the regional arena, simultaneously attempting to emerge as a neutral and acceptable mediator in the regional struggle and the negotiation process that was being prepared between Israel and several Arab states (and sponsored by the American administration).

Since then, Egypt's perception and methodology have emphasised the preservation of this role as a regional 'bridge' acceptable to all the negotiating parties. This status guarantees the continuity of American economic and military assistance to

Egypt. It allows Cairo to remain up-to-date on the daily workings of the negotiation process and to participate therein. It also grants Cairo a privileged position as a regional centre for negotiation, which guarantees it political weight at the international level. This in turn can be a pivotal point in Egypt's international economic and political action and can compensate for Egyptian losses due to the risks taken in the latter years of Sadat's incumbency.

Even though this status may prevent Egypt's direct participation in the conflict, it does not imply isolation from the rest of the Arab world. This situation was congruent with Egypt's economic and political circumstances during the '80s and early '90s, and for a period of time, Egyptian diplomacy was successful in achieving these limited objectives. But developments since the 1993 Oslo Accords, including the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement of 1994, and the establishment of relations between Israel and Gulf states (Qatar and Oman), then Tunisia and Morocco, have been gradually eroding the viability of this policy orientation. A number of reasons can be cited in support of this conclusion:

First, some international and regional actors (respectively the US, Turkey and Israel) strongly tend toward a marginalisation of the Egyptian role in arrangements for the new Middle East, particularly after Israel's successful strategic penetration of the Arab world after the Gulf War.

Second, US Congress and decision-making centres in the United States are partial to decreasing American assistance and loans to Egypt, and replacing them with what is called the 'partnership system'. Despite the fact that this might cause problems in the future, it may alleviate the pressure on Egyptian decision-makers.

Third, the emergence of military alliances, especially the Israeli-Turkish alliance, means that the region is vulnerable to any military attack from several sides. Iranian movements in the Gulf, and foreign nuclear and non-nuclear threats to the region, all disrupt regional equilibrium and require an Egyptian role receptive to Arab needs

and ready to protect Syria from possible military aggression and Iraq from disintegration.

Fourth, newly mobile borders, the racial and ethnic dissolution of relatively stable political entities (Iraq, Sudan, etc.) and the sanctions imposed on several Arab countries require an Egyptian policy that gives priority to strategic factors over old feuds and enmities.

Fifth, Syria, which is an active and effective party to the process of political settlement, is still resisting American, Israeli and Turkish pressures, and has preserved a degree of negotiating leverage.

Egypt could participate in the 'settlement battle' more positively than is currently the case in order to seize the opportunities that are now in danger of being forfeited. The dangers posed by the ascendancy of the extremist Zionist right in Israel require a new Egyptian political methodology: full support of Syria and Lebanon in the settlement negotiations, and the renunciation of a role as mediator or neutral spectator in the regional conflict. This state of affairs can achieve a number of strategic objectives. If Egypt strongly supports Syria and Lebanon in the negotiations, this would send a clear message to decision-makers in the United States and other Western countries that Cairo is still a competent pressure point in the region.

Consequently, this would reinforce the political process aiming at creating 'an Arab strategic critical mass' capable of tipping the balance in the region and putting an end to Israeli and Western hegemony.

An Egyptian attitude that clearly supports the Syrians and the Lebanese would put pressure on the Israeli right. Egyptian support would also consolidate the status of the Palestinian negotiators during an extremely difficult period of negotiation.

A clear-cut Egyptian attitude in this instance would do much to remedy the current state of collapse, and Arab intellectual and political division.

The writer is a researcher in economic and strategic affairs.

An article clerk

By Naguib Mahfouz

When I was first asked to contribute to *Al-Ahram* it was in my capacity as short story writer. I only started writing newspaper articles in the early '70s, when Youssef El-Siba'i was appointed editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram*. One day he came up to the sixth floor where the offices of Tewfik El-Hakim, Salah Taher, Hussein Fawzi, Youssef Gohar, Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Louis Awad and myself were located. He said: 'We need to make the best use of your presence in *Al-Ahram* so from now on each of you will write a diary-style article on a different day of the week.'

The following day he brought us a written schedule specifying the day on which each writer's article was to appear in print. I was taken aback and did not know what to do. I had never written an article before, so what was I to do?

The strange thing is that Youssef El-Siba'i, who forced me into contributing articles, was the one who later banned me from writing. This was at the time of the 1972 students' uprising. El-Siba'i, who found my articles not to his taste, insisted I return to publishing only fiction. But a year later, after the 1973 war, I returned to writing articles, and for 20 years had them regularly published on Thursday.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Al-Ahram: 'No one is prepared to accept current Israeli policies which are bound to fail, even if the Israeli ruling clique is under the illusion that they can have normal relations with the Arabs under unjust and unacceptable terms. The first casualty of such stances can only be the Middle East economic conference. Whether it is held on schedule or not, Israel's settlement building and its refusal to honour its commitments will render its failure inevitable.' (Ibrahim Nafie, 23 August)

Al-Ahram: 'President Mubarak hit the mark when he warned Israel that the Netanyahu administration's prevarication and its refusal to honour its commitments would have a negative effect on the peace process and threaten the possibility of holding the economic summit... It brought home to Israelis that their current stances would not lead to peace and peaceful co-existence or the acceptance of Israel as a state in the region. It is Israel's rightist policies that endanger hopes of economic integration in the region.' (Sanaa El-Said, 26 August)

Al-Ahram: 'President Mubarak's statement that there is no point in an economic summit unless there is a change in Israeli stances is the height of logic. Economic cooperation needs stability and Israel is not worthy of it in view of its recent 'Nos'. True progress in peace would entail Israel's getting out of Palestine, the Golan and Lebanon. It also means linking normalisation — despite my personal objection to it — to a just peace. Meaningless concessions are sheer political folly. The president's latest statements on peace and security must be the right start.' (Mahmoud El-Maraghi, 26 August)

Al-Ahram: 'The only steps Netanyahu is willing to make in the peace process are backwards... Hence, President Mubarak's warning that the economic summit will not be held unless Netanyahu changes his stances is an indication that Arab patience has begun to run out.' (Salama Ahmed Salama, 25 August)

Al-Wafd: 'Egypt will never be the bridge through which Israel will realise its ambitions. Before Cairo agrees to the economic summit Israel will have to take real positive steps to show its desire to complete the peace process. Without this clear demonstration we will refuse this conference.' (Editorial, 25 August)

Running out of patience

Al-Ahram: 'Instead of complaining about the continuation of settlement building we should prepare ourselves to confront normalisation in all its forms. We should embark on an organised plan to urge every shop or cafe owner to refuse to sell any Israeli product and denounce those that do. Boycott Israeli products and activities and you will stop settlement building!... It's either that or a flood of settlements creating a new status quo and bringing about a new popular reaction.' (Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, 21 August)

Al-Wafd: 'The US is asking the world to boycott Iran, Libya and Sudan. Yet it is enraged when the Arabs boycott Israel — what a strange paradox!' (Mohamed El-Hayawan, 23 August)

Al-Ahram: 'Like Nero weeping before a burning Rome, Netanyahu is doing everything in his power to turn the clock back to the '60s and early '70s, to spread the spectre of war, and to increase Palestinian violence in face of Israeli terrorism. Netanyahu's fires are many — he has decided to halt the peace process, and Israel under his rule will not respect its commitments to any previous accord be it Oslo, Taba or even Sharm El-Sheikh.' (Wagih Abu Zikri, 23 August)

Rose El-Youssefi: 'Perhaps Netanyahu believes that he is able to re-draw the region's map geographically, demographically and politically. This is a big illusion for he is not the only player capable of obstructing others' plans. And the great number of players with interests in the region lessens the possibility of unlimited US support for his policies after the presidential elections next November.' (Mahmoud El-Tohami, 26 August)

Al-Gomhuria: 'Beating the drums of war and warning of a future war with Syria is a hollow Israeli trick, used many times before, to draw attention away from Israel's settlement building policies which stand against the spirit of peace — a just and comprehensive peace... The solution lies in quick American action to uphold the principle of 'land for peace' and adopt an even-handed approach towards the parties concerned. The situation is dangerous and an explosion is inevitable unless peace supporters play the roles expected of them.' (Editorial, 24 August)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



I tried, in capturing the spirit of Ahmed Bahaeddin, to accentuate the cerebral aspect of his expression, the thick reading glasses, the laughing, for the likes of Ahmed Bahaeddin, even after death, remain with us.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Wrong man for the job

Last September, just as the UN was celebrating its 50th anniversary, I wrote that the future of the organisation looked far from certain. The US was then spearheading a campaign to curtail the activities of the UN, particularly when it came to peace keeping operations. It was a campaign that received the wholehearted support of the Republican majority in Congress, which was demanding that the US government refrain from involvement in any peace keeping operations in the future except those under US command.

At that time Washington had not yet voiced its categorical opposition to Boutros Ghali assuming a second term of office as secretary-general. On the contrary, at a function held on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UN, President Clinton heaped praise on Boutros Ghali, a gesture later explained somewhat disingenuously by Madeleine Albright as a casual compliment uttered by a president who had been brought up to be polite.

The American position has subsequently become clear, and as the battle to elect, or to deselect, Boutros Ghali for a second term moves inexorably on, US manoeuvring looks suspiciously like an attempt to provoke a crisis by fuelling differences between UN members, the intention being to eventually call into question not just the mandate of the secretary-general but the role of the organisation itself.

In a recent speech Bob Dole appeared to sound the Republican clarion call when he insisted that "when [he becomes] president, every man and woman in our armed forces will know that the president of the US is the commander-in-chief, not Boutros Ghali nor any other secretary-general of the United Nations."

This empty piece of rhetoric drew large applause from Republican Congress members, while one senior analyst on the *New York Times* read it as a caricature of the secretary-general, roaming the corridors of the organisation dressed one day as an American general, another as a Russian admiral, and a third as an Indian chief-of-staff.

Another American commentator had the good grace to point out that no one had benefited quite as much from the UN, certainly since the end of the Korean War, or had used it as often for its own purposes, as America itself. The UN was the main channel through which America built its alliance against Saddam Hussein, the main instrument through which it sought to realise its aims in Haiti. As to US service personnel not partaking in UN peace keeping missions, in Somalia US forces were kept under US command. And in addition to the political and military benefits that the US has reaped, the very fact that the UN headquarters are in New York pumps enormous funds into the city.

Madeline Albright and the Clinton administration, however, seem as immune to reasoned argument as the Republicans. Which leads one to the conclusion that the otherwise inexplicable desire of the US to ditch Dr Boutros Ghali is actually the opening shot in a battle intended to strip the international organisation of any mandate to deal with international disputes. This being the case, Boutros Ghali is certainly not the man they would like to see heading the UN. He is of far too high a calibre.



Soapbox

The real cause

The events in Jordan between 17-18 August are similar to those that occurred in Egypt in January 1977. Egypt, having emerged victorious from the October War, had then been too eager to enjoy the fruits of victory. The economic situation was dire, a fact that the government concealed. Officials constantly predicted an imminent reduction in prices, until, of course, the morning press of 17 January published a list of basic commodities the prices of which had doubled. Riots ensued.

Years later the same scenario has been replayed in Jordan. Peace with Israel, rather than ushering in immediate prosperity, was followed by increases in the prices of basic commodities, most significantly bread. The angry masses took to the street, and King Hussein was left with no choice but to call in the army to restore order, much as Sadat had done 19 years before.

But there are other lessons that might be learned by drawing a comparison between events in Egypt and Jordan. At the time Sadat blamed the communists as being the real instigators of the Egyptian riots, King Hussein has adopted a similar ploy, only he cites "foreign powers" as the culprits "behind the incidents" in his country. While both Sadat's and Hussein's accounts may contain some kernel of truth, we should not ignore the fact that the angry reactions of the public to price hikes is precisely that — an angry reaction to prices being raised without any prior notice or discussion.

The excuse for such secrecy is usually that otherwise merchants would stockpile in an attempt to make greater profits. But such profiteering on the part of traders is surely a lesser evil than rioting. Merchants could, if they were caught doing this kind of thing, be penalised appropriately.

We learned this lesson back in 1977 though it seems to be a lesson other countries have still to learn.

This week's Soapbox speaker is a senior columnist at Al-Ahram.



Salah Montasser

A scenario of reluctant progress

A settlement in the Middle East? Tahseen Basheer suggests three possible scenarios that stand a little short of war — and peace

Prediction is a dangerous game in the Middle East. The quiet sands of the political desert look permanent, yet are quickly stirred into volleys of sand, whether *khamasin* or Desert Storm. After the storm, there usually is a lull, during and after which people start trying to make sense of the changes or non-changes left behind.

In the Middle East, one could argue that there is nothing new under the sun, yet people feel born anew every day. The resurrection of memory, by design or stream of consciousness, plays an important part in everyday reality. This makes playing prophets especially risky. If the prophecy proves credible, messiahs emerge; but if it fails, another name is added to the long list of pseudo-prophets.

Thus I envision future scenarios with trepidation. With the above caveats, I restrict my predictions to the immediate and short-term time span. In forecasting future trends, one must differentiate between constant and dynamic factors. The population problem that confronts many Arab countries will continue and will have an increasing impact on national policy formulations. The difficulty is in predicting whether this development will affect the peace process positively or negatively. Some will choose to see the peace process as a secondary priority, concentrating on demographic pressures instead. Others will push for an accelerated solution and concentrate on the population problem afterwards.

On the Israeli side, it is easy to predict that the government will come under pressure to accelerate Jewish immigration and settlement in the West Bank rather than inside the Green Line. Jerusalem and its surrounding areas will see an intensification of existing settlements by the addition of more settlers, and there will be continuous efforts to create new settlements. The settlement policy will be pursued directly by the Israeli government and indirectly by the different parties to the government coalition. These parties are committed to a settlement policy speedier than what Mr Netanyahu is willing to publicly acknowledge.

The key challenge in the short-term is comprehending what options Netanyahu will settle for. The Arab public is being mystified by the contrasting images of the new prime minister. Is he a raving extremist who will erode all the pillars of the peace process, or is he a pragmatist attempting to ease out of campaign-rhetoric mode by repeating in every Arab capital that he will uphold the peace process? Netanyahu concentrates on a different constituency than either Rabin or Peres. His support is based on satisfying the economic aspirations of those sectors among the Israeli public who are more concerned

with their share of growing Israeli prosperity than with the expansion of peace.

The personal security of Israelis, shattered by the suicide bombings earlier this year, was used by the Israeli prime minister and the Likud to convince a majority of Israelis that the increased insecurity of individual Israelis is due to the Oslo Agreements. They portrayed the peace process as a threat to the security of Israeli citizens, at a time when Israel enjoys a quantitative and qualitative military advantage over the Arabs and exercises hegemonic control over the Palestinians.

Likud translated the complex relationship between peace and security into a formula that views the peace process as detrimental to Israeli security. Even Henry Kissinger swallowed the bait when he argued in a recent *Washington Post* article that security should be interpreted to mean the individual security of Israelis rather than its original meaning — the security of the state of Israel and of the Arab states. He suggested a trade-off, in which the Arabs "take account of the concern of the Israelis for personal security and not only strategic security."

The problematic inherent in this equation is that neither the Arabs nor the Israelis can guarantee "personal security" for their citizens. Only by ending the occupation can a better climate be created to achieve such security. If Israel increases its settlement activities, it will be nurturing a climate that induces extremism. There is a definite contradiction in the Israeli government's new policy orientation; its policies are likely to produce an outcome contrary to the security objective it claims.

The future depends on how we read the new Israeli prime minister. Demystifying Netanyahu, which is possible if we understand his working priorities, is the single most important challenge we face. The new leadership and its constituency have shifted their focus from the politics of peace to Israeli economic growth. This leadership aims not only to govern for four years, but also to achieve another victory after it completes its term in office by scoring on the economic front. Israeli leaders argue that the tremendous improvement in Israeli GNP — expected to reach \$17,000 per capita this year — is not related to the dividends of the peace process, which Israel attained as a result of renewed international acceptance. By dismissing this linkage, the *New York Times* Thomas Friedman suggests, Netanyahu's policy will be to pursue his domestic economic programme while avoiding any action that will derail the peace process, simultaneously avoiding anything that could advance it — and therefore cause a split in his coalition.

The prime minister must struggle to hold together a very difficult coalition; he faces the problem of domesticating it, if it is to agree with his policy choices rather than blasting them. Even with the newly acquired powers the prime minister has attained, this is still a daunting task. The young, dynamic Netanyahu, representing a new generation of Israeli leadership, must develop his own political persona; he can emulate neither the rigid Shamir nor the visionary Peres. He must work out his own political status; he would certainly like to go down in history as a great leader of Israel and of Zionism. A policy of polarity will not fulfil this aspiration for him.

The following scenarios, however, involve more general predictions. I call the first the "status quo scenario." In this scenario, as its name indicates, inertia becomes dominant. Regardless of the different rhetorical stands the parties might take to express advocacy, justification, opposition, or frustration, they will stay structurally in the same position. Little changes will only lead to movement in place. Time will not produce major changes; it will only result in a period of push-and-pull in which no major breakthroughs occur. It is a scenario of time wasted and opportunities lost.

There is, however, a faint hope in this scenario that the vicissitudes of the peace process will make the parties gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of peace and discard their policies of deflection and avoidance; each side may thus broaden the support base for peace and prepare the ground for future progress.

The second possibility is the "erosion scenario," in which the failure to tackle difficult dilemmas in a substantive way, coupled with a failure to adopt tactics that would ease tensions resulting from attempts to buy time while avoiding solutions and compromises, leads to the erosion of the hopeful climate that existed after Oslo and the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, and that highlighted the possibility of dynamic progress towards a mutually acceptable compromise. A state of anticipation and euphoria would end in severe disappointment, resulting in a sense of collective despair, which could easily become the breeding ground for gloom-and-doom politics. These conditions might push the area, particularly the occupied Palestinian territories, into a state of active resistance and the rejection of peace. Whether this resistance occurs piecemeal or collectively, a new type of intifada might emerge.

Similar incidents might occur, independently or concurrently, if Israel attempts to engage Syrian forces in Lebanon in a military duel. The outcome of these opera-

tions might be confined to limited yet dramatic flare-ups, or could develop into a more prolonged battle of attrition; either way, the status quo that currently prevails will be eroded, and the peace momentum will be lost — at least temporarily.

Some of Netanyahu's advisors discount the possibility of another intifada, arguing that Palestinian frustration would be more likely to erupt against Arafat and the Palestinian Authority than against Israel. They also suggest that the new policy of lifting the closure will offer better economic conditions for the mass of Palestinians, thus dissuading them from pursuing anti-Israeli activities. This argument is shored up by assertions that Syria is too isolated to face Israel militarily, and that the basic Syrian reaction will be limited to heated verbiage and more Hizbullah attacks.

The third scenario is that of "reluctant progress." According to this option, Netanyahu ultimately adopts a pragmatic policy with some improvements along the various bilateral tracks, without reaching any conclusions on the basic issues. This would occur regardless of any ideological differences between the parties, which tend to grow increasingly sharp and strident according to the tenor of Netanyahu's rhetoric. Small, pragmatic steps might produce a new climate of practical interests clear to all sides, and create an incentive to continue the process despite differences regarding its frames of reference. All parties will find that it is not in their interest to escalate tensions; instead, they will attempt to work out limited steps that will maintain the status quo, but will offer enough inducements and rewards to continue an inconclusive and pragmatic approach to the conflict for a number of years. New priorities might emerge, new coalitions develop, and limited progress be achieved. Incremental tactical improvements characterise this scenario, and a pragmatic policy could work as a safety net that would preclude both the disintegration of the status quo, and its mummified maintenance.

A sustainable peace will have to await a different time, with different players and different perceptions. I am no Cassandra, but I do not believe that policies of state-to-state wars are in the offing. I expect fluctuations of political tension and psychological instability, but peace — at least in the sense of no interstate wars — has been well established. One task remains: to establish a positive policy that encourages mutual acceptance and cooperative developments among the peoples of the Middle East.

The writer is senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace.

Out of the 'Arab predicament'

Galal Amin has asked: "Do the Arabs have a future?" On the battlefield, replies Archie Mafeje, dreams can become part of reality

In *Al-Ahram Weekly* (25-31 July) I happened to see a bold title: "Do the Arabs have a future?" What an intriguing — or insane — question, I thought, depending on what was meant by it. I was even more intrigued when I discovered that the author of the article was Dr Galal Amin — an old friend, fellow-traveller, and a colleague from the American University in Cairo, where our paths often crossed. Therefore, I had less cause to be surprised, as Dr Galal Amin is known to be a bold and daring intellectual — something for which I admire him greatly. Nonetheless, bold and daring people can often get away with murder due to the sheer force of their personalities and the actual or apparent novelty of their ideas. Although I am not in the habit of making public comments on the affairs of the Middle East, precisely because I do not know enough about the region, this time I felt that even an amateur such as me could challenge some of Dr Amin's assertions and pre-suppositions, which might be nothing else but a cry of pain.

First, it is historically questionable that Arabs have suffered "humiliation for centuries." Such an unqualified time-perspective does not tell us much, especially that in his text he refers only to the last 200 years. This could hardly account for the rise of Islamic civilisation and Arab expansion along both sides of the Mediterranean all the way to the shores of the Atlantic, and southwards along the eastern coast of Africa. If the reference point for the humiliation of the Arabs is the rise of Western civilisation and colonialism, the Arabs share this with other ex-colonial countries but it does not mark the beginning or the end of the history of the colonised peoples. In contrast, Dr Amin makes it appear that stagnation and decline have characterised Arab history since time immemorial. He is so convinced about this original sin that he dares to suggest that Mohammed Ali's "Arab Awakening" from 1820-40 and Nasser's revolution of 1952-67 (he does not refer to the 1919 Revolution and the defiant spirit of the 1940s) should be looked upon as interludes in a continuous story of damnation. Not only is this historiographically questionable, it cannot but be a source of the deep pessimism which happens to pervade Dr Amin's discourse. This is epitomised by the astounding question: "Do the Arabs have a future?"

But then, Dr Amin recognises the apparent absurdity

of this question, for elsewhere in his presentation he grants that, like any Third World country or Russia after the collapse of its empire, the Arabs do have a future insofar as they are capable of achieving "rapid economic progress." This is an article of faith which would be difficult to deny or to clarify since economic progress does not occur in a social vacuum. In fact, it presupposes the existence of a vibrant and innovative society — a virtue which according to him Arabs have long since lost. To reconcile the postulated social malaise and psychological collapse among the Arabs with the affirmation that, like anybody else, they are capable of rapid economic development, Dr Amin shifts his argument disconcertingly from a historical to a moral plane, by transposing his original question to a different one: "Can the Arabs develop their economies without reproducing the same ugly, crowded and polluted cities, the same consumer culture, the same...?" etc. This question is probably inconsequential because all the social ills he is referring to are already very much in evidence everywhere in the Third World, without the benefit of economic development (not far from home, Cairo is a living example of this). Whether we like it or not, it is obvious that under the present circumstances underdeveloped countries would be happy to achieve economic development of any kind. But this has proved an elusive goal for most of them while poverty, pollution, and consumerism among their elites has continued unabated.

It would seem, therefore, before we can even raise the question of post-industrialism which is not a matter for single peoples or regions, we should explain why for example Arabs have not attained industrialism, despite their early start and some significant initiatives in modern history in a country such as Egypt, which Dr Amin tends to use (perhaps rightly so) as an index of "Arab nationalism." Not surprisingly, even on this score Dr Amin, the free-floating signifier, social philosopher and moralist, is not to be out-done. Indeed, he declares that: "One idea which should be quickly dispensed with is that any worthwhile reform may be achieved within the present political framework. The truth is that no amount of 'Arab summits', agreements or conferences which declare their aim to be finding a way out of the present Arab predicament could really be a step towards a solution. They are themselves symptoms of this predicament." Stirring words! But this is an indictment,

without redress. What is the present political framework and what is the alternative? It may be asked. Having entered the political arena, once again Dr Amin exits through the back door by treating the matter as basically a problem of intellectual praxis. He accordingly castigates those Arab intellectuals who, like Dr Faustus, have sold their souls to the devil for the sake of immediate personal benefits and rationalised their moral depravity by pointing to the inevitability of the triumph of Western imperialism and Zionism. Nor is he enamoured of those intellectuals whom he calls "dreamers", who seem to cling to the past and outmoded ideas. In concrete terms it is not clear what Dr Amin holds against intellectual dreamers, because he might be one himself.

The belief that Arabs are capable of recapturing some of their past revolutionary nationalism and militancy is not unjustified. What the prospects are in the present epoch is a question which is perhaps worth dreaming about day and night, for that is how utopias are produced — a vision of a new world full of promise and hope. While such dreams may be dismissed as unrealistic, it is only mental projections which transcend the given which count as intellectual. Despite his reservations about "dreamers", Dr Amin indirectly confirms this view when he asks contemptuously: "What remains of an intellectual if he/she bows to current trends, however powerful or inevitable these trends may seem to be?" Therefore, it can be concluded that for the intellectual, critique is of the essence — a position fiercely advocated by Edward Said during his 1993 Reith Lectures. In the circumstances we are faced with, an inevitable question is whether Dr Amin's "realists" or apologists for the status quo can legitimately be regarded as intellectuals. By using the term "intellectual" indiscriminately and simultaneously dismissing both "realists" and "dreamers", Dr Amin fore-closed his own chance to ponder the question, who are the Arab intellectuals, and why?

A systematic investigation of this issue would have revealed the unity of politics and intellectual praxis in the context of the national question in the Arab world and would have made less illusory some of Dr Amin's unacknowledged "dreams", such as the establishment of a "psychological quarantine" for the protection of the young, revision of our system of "education", increasing the attainment of our "own cultural values" and "revival

of religious faith", without saying how, by whom, and on what social basis. In a time of crisis, these are all parts of a contested terrain and it is the role of the critical intellect to make the underlying contradictions so apparent that the struggle for a social mandate is sharply focused, and all serious contenders cannot afford not to commit themselves to one alternative or the other. This is the threshold at which even dreams become part of reality and the intellectuals become organic intellectuals. This is particularly so if the governments themselves have, as Dr Amin suggests, become part of the national predicament.

Indeed, all evidence testifies to the fact that most Arab regimes are beholden to Western imperialism and that their economic, political, and military policies are subject to American veto. To what extent do most the Arabs see this as part of the national predicament? What do they themselves believe in? Can the Arab intelligentsia identify it and articulate it in such a way that it becomes the cornerstone of the national question? This does not require government permission, nor is it contingent on any agreements they might make with imperialist forces. For instance, it is apparent that the Arabs in general reject Zionism and are intensely resentful of the role of Israel in the Middle East, despite the fact that some of their governments have signed peace accords with the Israeli government. But then their hostility towards American imperialism is not so manifest and yet Israel is nothing without unqualified American support. Likewise, a number of Arab regimes would not be able to exercise as much repressive power on the demos, without covert support from the Americans whose interest is to guarantee the flow of oil from the Middle East.

Therefore, one wonders if Dr Amin, by depicting the Arabs as feckless melancholic-depressives and victims of endemic decline/decay, did not unwittingly detract from the national question which hinges on the role of US (Western) imperialism in the Middle East and on the collaborationist policies adopted by Arab rentier-client states since the demise of the Nasserite revolution. These are only questions and queries from an interested outsider and Dr Amin might be able to show with great panache how irrelevant or otherwise they are to the "Arab predicament".

The writer is former visiting professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the American University in Cairo.

Staying for the pudding

Gravity? Deny it.
Time? Defy it.
David Blake
sits in the
observation car

The festival of the winds is almost finished — and so it is almost good-bye for another year to both upstairs and down. A few more nights and this annual summer festival will be gone. The wind machine, at least in its present form, will be dismantled at the Citadel, hopefully forever. But down in the Opera House's Open Air theatre we have some left-overs from the banquet, from the rough going sonic Citadel show that was rather condescendingly billed a festival of mass culture.

The 24 August saw a run-through repeat of the finale at the Citadel. But before the last good-bye were two lesser farewells in the open space of the Opera. The Chaika group — folkloric dancers from Russia — played on 19 August. They whirled and twirled like the washing machines of Cairo, without toil or trouble and without stop. Not a large group, they performed a limited choreography though with unceasing energy.

The dancers were very Russian — handsome, tall and live, girls and boys alike. There were some really plump types, and the strange thing was that the fatter they were the higher they jumped. Sweating and steaming, they did miraculously quick aerial turns before landing light as feathers. Heavy weights, it seems, dance lightly if they are Russian. They had arrived from their performance at the Ismailia festival without any trace of travel fatigue. The performance continued, filling the stage, the open-air space and night air with their energy.

Dressed as floral border flowers they formed first blue then white lines before whizzing off to the wings to return in scarlet and black with red boots and Cossack cloaks flying. After endless costume changes the entire group emerged for their finale dressed totally in pink. This sounds banal but was not: Russian pink is like Turkish pink, *pevne* they call it in Turkey. And there is no colour like it for subtlety. The group looked gorgeous. The plump ones grew plumper, the thin ones thinner. They whirled to a crescendo of fury, headed off stage, out into the garden where they disappeared. High-voltage Russians melting into the night.

The 22 August saw the ultimate *takhi* played to a full house. The conductor was Farouk El-Babli. Do the public ever tire of these song fests? This one brought in a huge audience that crowded even in the colonnades. The wind was merciful, allowing the songs and the singers to make a much fuller impression than anything possible at the Citadel. The songs were kindly: no passion anywhere or darkness. The first singer, Omar El-Said, a tenor built for soft effects to which the audience were



The Chaika group from Russia — energising a Cairo summer night

drawn, brought an ecstatic response. The next singer was Azza Nasr: she looked imposing and had a voice to match. The songs were about being forgotten by her love. She sang well, but really did not look a forgettable type. Mustafa Ahmed sang a song about staking hands after it's all over. He looked splendid, and had a fine baritone voice. Cheery he sounded.

The last song was by May — a small name for an ample singer. Tall, beautiful, unfurled, no tricks or soliciting of her audience. She is handsome rather than pretty, with a rich resonating voice which she knows how to use. A true

performer, she kept her adoring audience at a distance.

The song was antique Umm Kalthoum: *El-Atfal*. A straight-on confrontation with one of Umm Kalthoum's unique offerings. Umm Kalthoum used to intone a part of the poem, allowing her voice to stay poised on a cliff-edge before flying to a safe landing, much as Callas would do — much as all supreme artists can. But none of this with May. It was a song of some time ago, sung by some other lady, but May did it her way. She managed the full high fortissimo conclusion with real style. Then the ap-

plause and flowers and the spin-off of the diva life coming down to ordinary people. No repeats. She showed some pleasure at the people's enthusiasm but not a crumb more than was necessary. Stately but with humour, she left. May's OK and could go all the way.

So came a second helping of a meal begun at the windy Citadel. Nice to hear Dvorak was such a lovely, orderly, warm uncle. A strength in troubled times. Civilised and melodic, this was the image tonight, safely out of the way of the storms of the Citadel. We had the first movement of the cello concerto. The soloist, Hassan Mo'az, played with subtlety and warmth, clear and golden. He even paused in the long quiet sections for sheer pleasure. And we were allowed to go aloft into the celestial Dvorakian areas intended. The first movement only, but a chilly indictment of the musical inadequacies of the Citadel as a performance space.

Final piece, 24 August, Beethoven's *Fantasy for Piano*. This piece is a long, jubilant affair, full of the spirit of *Fidelio* and the 9th Symphony. Dazzling, almost collegiate, music. The piece shows off the piano and this pianist, Pascale Rosier, did well as to tempo — often sharply furious, covering big areas of virtuoso writing. She was always there on the dot. But what was lacking was the tone, which was too often thin and superficial. What is needed is firm, deep Beethoven song. This was missing. But she sounded noble. The chorus did well and the soloists particularly so — George Wamnis, tenor, Rada El-Wakil, bass, Awatef El-Sharkawi, mezzo-soprano, and soprano Nevine Aljoubi kept the vocal line resolutely on the heights.

Next came the traditional songs orchestrated by Mustafa Nagui. Nothing critical needed, they were just enjoyment. *Travels with Someone's Uncle*, 1926, before the big crash. Complete musical visuals. Back to the same old palm trees and death on the Nile? Not quite — we go instead into something more stylish — but why is it that the traditions of colonialism die hardest in music? This is super Thomas Cook Waggon Lit. The first song took us into an observation car that never existed. Refreshment? Pêche Melba, caviar and champagne as the world went by. Which world was never revealed, but it might be riverine, or could be the old Mena House drawing room. The tar-boosh is worn. Great ladies go about reeking of Chanel and villas at Monaco. This is no film story, it is music. Too rapid for scenarios. *Something rhumb* bold begins. It all slips away from us. A very practical dream. Someone will have to play the bill, but not Mustafa Nagui who wrote the elegant, irresistible music.

Someone wants to keep quiet. He's a cop who wants to help her... whether she wants it or not. She's a woman with a secret

Someone wants to keep quiet. He's a cop who wants to help her... whether she wants it or not. She's a woman with a secret

Someone wants to keep quiet. He's a cop who wants to help her... whether she wants it or not. She's a woman with a secret

Dancing to an international tune

The International Folklore Festival, held in Ismailia, disproved the assumption that only the largest cities can accommodate international events. Mursi Saad El-Din argues for a more equitable sharing of the cultural cake

Egypt boasts a large number of international festivals, and the number is growing. Alongside the Cairo Film Festival and its Alexandrian equivalent, the International Festival of Experimental Theatre and the Alexandria Biennale, Ismailia too has its share of the cake. For this picturesque town on the Suez canal has become the venue for an international festival of folklore.

Ismailia is, in many respects, the perfect venue for such an event. It is located on the Suez Canal, at a crossroads between continents. And it possesses — this is no small advantage and should not be overlooked — a delightfully moderate climate, one reason, perhaps, among many, why so many of the town's inhabitants took to the streets to cheer the festival's participants last week.

The bulk of performances took place in the recently constructed open-air theatre of the cultural palace, a magnificent space in which to watch the performances by over 40 different troupes from 28 countries.

The festival was inaugurated by Brigadier Abdel-Salam El-Mahgoub, the governor of Ismailia, together with Hussein Mahran, chairman of the Department of Popular Culture and Mohamed Khalil, undersecretary for folklore, himself a keen dancer and choreographer.

During the opening ceremony over 1,800 dancers took part in the parade, dressed in brightly coloured costumes traditional to their respective towns and villages. Within such a genre, comprising so many different national, regional and even village-based idioms, it would be an impossible task to judge between the different groups which is why no competition is involved in this event. Yet there can be no doubting that the crowd had its own enthusiasms and its own favourites, a fact evinced in the varying levels of applause.

The Batochi group from Chile, for

instance, received such a colossal ovation that there were obliged to return to the stage and repeat several dances. Their performance of 18 folk dances, accompanied by five musicians playing traditional folk instruments, proved one of the most popular items in the festival. As did the troupe Tin Rozana, from Slovenia, and the young Chinese troupe the Jinhua Popular Art Delegation, who danced with bouquets of flowers held aloft, quivering like birds in the breeze.

The world was represented by troupes from Jordan, Palestine and Syria, and while there was only the smallest African representation, the energy of the National Dancing and Performing Arts Troupe of Zanzibar made up, in quality, for what was lacking in quantity.

This year the festival appears to be expanding its horizons for, in addition to the performances in Ismailia, a number of troupes also danced in other towns along the Suez Canal, in Alex-

andria and at the Open Air Theatre of the Cairo Opera House, which hosted performances by 13 of the participating troupes.

Numbers seldom tell the truth about anything but here, I feel, it is im-

portant to offer a few statistics so that the reader might gauge the magnitude of the event. In the course of the festival some 242 performances were presented, 188 of them taking place in Ismailia. Twelve temporary stages were erected in the town's many gardens and clubs, and while no audience figures are available it is fair to say that many thousands of Ismailia's citizens attended one or more of the performances.

The logistical challenges involved in organising an event such as this are simply mind boggling. I am not at all sure how the organising committee, composed of members of the Department of Popular Culture, managed to transport, feed, accommodate and schedule performances by the 1,800 artists who participated. I do know, though, that we owe them a hearty vote of thanks for having undertaken the task and for ensuring that everything ran so smoothly.

Thanks, too, must go to the governor of Ismailia and to Sayed Awad, the festival's director of press and information.

Cairo and Alexandria appear to be weighed under with the number of international events they host. The Ismailia experience, vis-à-vis this festival, is certainly enough to prove that smaller towns in Egypt have the resources and infrastructure to host such events equally as successfully as the larger cities. So perhaps, in the future planning of such events, I might suggest to those responsible that they do not fall into the trap of thinking that only the country's major cities make appropriate venues.



A far from stilted performance from the French

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Group Show

Mashreq Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 10am-5pm. Show featuring the works of artists who have exhibited at the gallery over the past six years, including Adel El-Sawi, Fahy Hassan, Ibrahim El-Haddad and Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil 1 Kefour El-Akhdid St. Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm. Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin, a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalil's and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared.

Egyptian Museum Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm. The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room.

Coptic Museum Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm. Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum Pori Said St. Ahmed Maher St. Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm. A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiyas*, lustres, ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 3pm-5pm. A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum Chateau Pyramids, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghundi St. Giza. A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum Tahrir Sq. Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm. A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and *Awakened* became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post-revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St. Garden City. The Cherry Orchard, 29 August, 6pm.

Shun Nakamura's award-winning 1990 screen adaptation of Chekhov's play, exposing the cruel differences between life as presented to young girls and life as it really is. Subtitled in Arabic.

Masala Abul-Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 392 5162. Usual Usual Se 29 August, 4pm. Starring Mitun and Vinod Mehra.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

El-Zaman Wal-Kilab (The Age of Dogs) Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St. Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nazr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Horreyia Mall, Rozz, Heliopolis. Tel 575 5053. Daily

1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Ightiyal (Assassination) Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St. Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rozz, Rozz Sq. Heliopolis. Tel 252 8344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Faten Hammama, Manial. El-Roda. Tel 364 9767. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq. Mohandessin. Tel 368 0117. Daily 8pm. With Nadia El-Gundi.

Nasser '56 Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St. Tel 250 0254. Daily 12.30, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St. Tel 250 0254. Thursday & Saturday midnight show. El-Haram, El-Haram St. Giza. Tel 383 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Taba, 112 Tahrir St. Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Maadi Grand Mall, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq. Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Taba, 112 Tahrir St. Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Thursday & Saturday midnight show. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St. Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St. Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 16th July St. Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Tiba II, Nazr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Screening of Nasser '56 planned to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. With Ahmed Zaki in the title role, making a credible stab at transcending the mannerisms of the late president.

Waiting to Exhale and Lahib El-Intigam (Flame of Revenge) Normandy, outdoor, showing 31 El-Ahram St. Tel 250 0254. Daily at 7.30. Waiting to Exhale is the story of four women, their friendship, loves and lives. Lahib El-Intigam stars El-Shahat Mabrouk.

Dunston Checks In El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St. Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Thurs midnight show. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

A con artist checks into a hotel to pull some scams. His accomplice, Dunston the orangutan, has ideas of his own.

Fair Game Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St. Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. She's a woman with a secret

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Around the galleries

PIONEER of modern Egyptian sculpture, an art form that had been abandoned for 2,000 years, Mohamed Mahmoud Mukhtar (1891-1934) is one of Egypt's most important 20th century artists. Over 200 of his statues are housed in the Mukhtar Museum, located on Tahrir Street, across from the Cairo Opera House. Founded in 1964, the museum was designed by architect Ramsis Wissa-Wassef in such a way as to allow natural light to illumine each of the sculptures.

Mukhtar's genius was to combine a Pharaonic idiom with a more realist concern with anatomy, a sense of monumentality with an attention to detail, hieratic outline with internal formal dynamism. This combinatory genius is clearly illustrated in the sculptures on exhibit in the museum, especially in those of felahin — particularly *Khamasin Winds* and *The Return from the South*.

Though three of his most famous sculptures — *Egypt Awakened* (1928) in Giza Square, and the Cairo and Alexandria statues of Saad Zaghloul (1930-1932) — are located outside the museum walls, the Mukhtar Museum is a must-see for anyone interested in contemporary Egyptian art.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashry

Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. A gangster film from director Martin Scorsese. With Sharon Stone and Robert DeNiro.

MUSIC

Arabic Takht Open Air Theatre, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0398. 29 August, 9pm.

Greek folkloric dance Open Air Theatre, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0398. 30 August, 9pm. Final Cairo performance for the festival of folkloric dance.

THEATRE

El-Sitt Hoda Sayed Darwish Theatre, Al-Azhar. Tel 482 5602, 4825106. The National Theatre, production transfers to Alexandria for the summer.

Brothers Rascals El-Abd Theatre, Alexandria. Tel 596 0144.

Ballo (Faunaro) Madinet Nasr Theatre, Yousef Abbas St. Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm. Starring Salah El-Sadani and directed by Samir El-Afouki.

Zawabulita Eli Mahatta (Hilaluloo at the Station) Floating Theatre. Tel 366 5516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.

El-Gazaf (The Chasin) El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 335 2484. Daily 9pm.

Mess' El-Kheir Tani... Ya Mess' (Good Evening Egypt, Again) Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin. Tel 770 603. Daily exc Tues, 9.30pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader) El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 9.30pm. Directed by Sherif Arafa, starring Adel Imam.

Dastoor Ya Sidsna (With Your Permission, Masters) El-Fanar Theatre, Ramessy St. Tel 578 2444. Daily 10pm, Sat 8.30pm. With Ahmed Bedier and directed by Galal El-Sharkawi.

Ka'b 'Aali (High Heels) Radio Theatre, 24 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily exc Tues, 8.30pm; Wed & Thurs, 10pm.

Mama America Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Daily 10pm, Mon 8pm.

Directed by and starring, Mohamed Sobhi.

Bahlool Fi Istanbul (Bahlool in Istanbul) Ramsis Hilton Theatre, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily exc Mon, 10pm. With Samir, Ghazim and Elham Shabine.

Hazzemal Ya... El-Galaa Theatre, Abdel-Aziz Al-Seoud, Manial. Tel 364 4140. Daily 10pm, Fri & Sun, 8.30pm. Starring Fifi Abdou, directed by Samir El-Afouki.

El-Gamila (The Beautiful and the Ugly) Zouheir Theatre, 13 Shagaret El-Dorr St. Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily exc Wed, 10pm. Leila Eloui as the beauty and everyone else as the uglier. Directed by Hussein Kamel.

Yahna Ya Hama Belram El-Tahr Theatre, Alexandria. Tel 597 9900.

The Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre will take place between 1-11 September, occupying all theatres in the state sector, including Cairo Opera House's small hall and open air spaces, and Al-Hanager theatre. Unfortunately, at the time of going to press, no programme of performances and venues was available. For other details of the festival, see opposite page.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St. Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/832.

Compiled by Inji El-Kashfi

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A little home cooking

Nehad Solaiha makes the rounds of the Egyptian theatres to see what is cooking for the Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre



Karim El-Touss's *El-Muhamarr*. Will it be the Egyptian competition entry?

With only a few days to go until the opening of CIEFET, the issue of the Egyptian entry into the international competition is still to be settled. The selection committee faces a lighter task than in previous years, with only five productions to choose from. One reason for this is that the state-theatre sector has been working at less than its usual steam this year. The head of the sector, Sami Khashaba, seems to be exercising the virtue of economy, unlike his predecessor, Sayed Radi, who pelted us last year with no less than 13 shows — half-baked and hastily concocted for the occasion — Khashaba has only three shows to offer the selection committee. In comparison, El-Hanager Centre has no less than six, four of them completely new, with two still in the final rehearsal stage. The Opera House, predictably, trotted out Walid Aoum's dance-theatre piece on the life of Tahyia Halim, *The Last Interview*, and the Cultural Palace Organisation has offered a production of Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*.

A refreshing newcomer to the arena this year is the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) which is sponsoring two productions which will play during the festival. It has been suggested that one of them — the Rebellion Theatre's *Kaspar* (based on Peter Handke's famous play and shown last year) — be seen by the Festival selection committee. *Kaspar* was originally sponsored by the Goethe Institute. For its current run, Rebellion applied to CDF, which also paid for the show's trip to Italy where it was invited to the Mediterranean Festival in Bari. If all goes well and no airline hitches occur, they will be seen by the selection committee today, at the final hour.

The other Cultural Development Fund production, by El-Ma'bad (The Temple) theatre company, is based on three texts, all dealing with the story of Oedipus: Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Ali Salem's *You Killed the Beast*. Other material is also interwoven, such as excerpts from Jean Cocteau's memoirs in Egypt, speeches from Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, and choruses from various other Greek plays. Apart from the innovative text, the show, entitled *Oedipus the Leader*, promises a very exciting scenography, with video projections of old films and specially filmed footage of the actors, including a scene where Oedipus machine-guns Laina down after a dispute as to whose Mercedes has the right of way. In addition, there is a specially constructed catwalk that divides the stage into two Theatre languages; and a crucified Prometheus suffering pitifully in the balcony. Ahmed El-Azhar's actors are exceptionally sensitive and well-trained; the majority of them were trained in theatre either at the AUC or abroad. This made it possible for Al-Hanager, the director, to present the show in three different languages: Arabic, French and English. When I watched a rehearsal of *Oedipus the Leader*, I thought it stood a very good chance of making an impression on the international jury if chosen to represent Egypt at the contest. Unfortunately, however, the troupe applied for funding rather late with the result that the show will not be ready before the committee's deadline. Still, audiences can get the chance to see the show at the Wallace from 1-7 September; the theatre was provided free in a generous gesture from the AUC to its students and alumni who are members of El-Ma'bad.

Al-Hanager's contribution to the festival this year is, as usual, young and exuberant. Three productions have already been seen by the public: *Mannequin*, *Desertscape II*, and *Joseph the Tiger*, of which *Mannequin* was nominated for viewing by the selection committee. Unfortunately, director Hana Abdel-Fattah took the unwise step of acting the whole of the second act in the interests of brevity. It was a case of cutting off his nose to spite his face, without the second part, in which a shop-keeper downy invades the world of humans, creating many hilarious situations, side-splitting, mis- understandings and generally wreaking havoc as he goes on his merry way, the show lost most of its verve, energy and humour.

Al-Hanager would have done much better to choose Effat Yehya's flamboyant and frothy satire on life in Egypt today, *Desertscape II* is based on Alastair Curding's play *Lanark*, translated and adapted by Ahmed Ismail with the director. The original was severely cut down, modified and Egyptianised, and infused with poems by Salah Jahine and Elisha Abu Mady, excerpts from Edna O'Brien's *Virginia*, Boris Strassner's *The Time and the Room*, old Egyptian songs and many barbed satirical parodies of politicians, preachers and popular entertainers. Structurally it resembles boxes within boxes, with each story generating a new one. It begins with the creation of the world, where two spirits representing art and music (one spirit wears a hat with the handle of a knife sticking out from it, the other a head-gear topped with a palette) introduce light and sound into

the world at the instructions of a mysterious 'creator'. It proceeds to present an image of a doomed society of political charlatans, frustrated lovers, oppressed artist, drug addicts and lost souls — all riddled with skin cancer to boot — and ends with the appearance of the mysterious creator/author, a la Pirandello in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, who goes on to write the disastrous final scene. All are doomed to die because they are failures, and he prophesies an earthquake that will wipe the country off the map amid the hysterical shrieking and wailing of some characters and the ludicrous postifications and deluded ramblings of others. It was a forceful, impressive scene and was followed by the author calling for a blackout. The lights come up on the cast standing in line to take their bows, and suddenly they all jump into a gaping hole in the stage, created specially by the director, and used throughout the play for some of its most exciting and original effects. Only the author remains on stage, with the political charlatans, the eternal winner, whereupon they walk off arm-in-arm.

Effat Yehya has a flair for visual effects, achieved with the simplest possible means. As in her previous *Desertscape I* (based on Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*), the set consists simply of lengths of material hung and shaped to represent sand dunes, and two traditional Egyptian handcars. She depended on her cast, costumes, lighting, masks and human-sized puppets to inject colour and variety into her scenes. Her cast was more than competent; their enthusiasm and solid acting technique were largely responsible for the artistic energy, biting relevance, and sense of urgency that run through *Desertscape II*. The malaise which infected the lives of the five women representing the history of female oppression in *Desertscape I* has here spread to the whole society, achieving the proportions of an existential plague.

While *Joseph the Tiger*, adapted from a German text by director Ashraf Farouk, may not compare favourably with Yehya's production, and seems cluttered and simplistic in its overall conception, Al-Hanager is expected to produce two more shows which come up to the centre's usual standard of artistic excellence. After six years as lead dancer with the Cairo Opera Dance Theatre

Troupe, currently under the direction of Walid Aoum, Karim El-Touss has decided to venture into the world of choreography and designed a dance-theatre piece about a group of young men and women searching for spiritual fulfilment and inner peace. In *El-Radwa* (which means contentment but carries the religious sense of divine blessing), folklore is roped in, especially rituals of exorcism, initiation rites, and whirling dervishes' dances. The soundtrack is a musical collage derived from the works of Egyptian composers and folk tunes.

Hani Abdel-Mutamid's *El-Muhamarr* (The Clown) uses circus-clown antics and routines, mime and masks, to offer a new, up-dated version of this classical text by the Syrian playwright Mohamed El-Maghout. Hopefully it, together with the other plays, will be on show during the festival, and I earnestly advise you to pay a few visits to Al-Hanager during the festival.

Walid Aoum's *The Last Meeting* was extensively covered on this page when it was first performed this year, and it will undoubtedly be a strong candidate. Its technical polish is unmatched in any production currently on offer.

The question of technical polish is an ever-present bug-aboo for Egyptian theatre directors. Indeed, the two other candidates for the production representing Egypt — *The Symphony of Lear*, directed by Imtiaz Abdel-Fattah at Al-Ghad Theatre, and *El-Ma'bad* (The Temple), adapted by Samih Mahran from Yehia El-Tahir Abdalla's novel *The Collar and the Bracelet* at El-Tali's Theatre — have great potential except for some rough edges and lack of attention to details. Abdel-Fattah's *Lear* boldly splits Shakespeare's play down the middle, removing the 'Gloucester/Edmund/Edgar' subplot, stripping it down to its original folk tale bones, and reducing the play to a straightforward story about a poor old father betrayed by his two eldest daughters and achieving wisdom in the end. The potential for sentimentality in such a treatment was mitigated by the musical conception of the whole show and its subtle evocation of the Renaissance Masque — that ornate, elaborate theatrical form which reached its height at the English Court at the hands of Ben Jonson and the Italian designer Inigo Jones in the early 17th cen-

Even for those who have not read the original novel, the story is easy enough to grasp; it revolves round the themes of sexual impotence, the oppressive, vicious life cycle of women in backward societies, and the destructive influence of tradition.

The three forces that oppress the heroine are the religious order, represented by the holy man, the patriarchal order, represented by the sick father and absent brother, and male sexual exploitation, represented by her husband. Ironically, and quite predictably, all three forces turn out to be impotent; nevertheless, they conspire to destroy her. The high point of the show is her visit to the temple which reminds us of Yehia's visit to the mountainside in Lorca's play. Like Samih Mahran's former play, *Child of Sand*, also an adaptation of a novel, this production qualifies as a feminist play par excellence. The director did well to use young, enthusiastic actors to deploy his cast all around the hall on smaller stages and use live folk singers and musicians. The acting was generally competent and the actors did their best to reproduce the rhythms and intonations of the speech of that part of Upper Egypt where the novel is set; if they carried themselves along with its sensuous poetic language and rich rhythms. The choice of costume was particularly happy, so was the inclusion of a Nubian singer who chanted parts of local erotic songs. But for a naive scene where a statue from the temple descends dutifully from his niche, complete with clouds of fire and smoke, to impregnate the heroine, as specified in legend, and the exclusion of the original script's incestuous romance, the show would have given an overpowering impression of Egyptian authenticity.

One cannot honestly say that the selection committee has its hands full with only five shows — may be six: the manager of Al-Salam Theatre has suddenly, at the time of writing, informed me of his decision to jump in with a production called *El-Chagari* (The Gypsy) — they will not have to spend hours tolerating (and deliberating over) endlessly boring shows. The difficulty is that most offerings are more or less equal in technical, intellectual and artistic merit — and there's the rub.

Plain Talk

Regularly I return to the poetry of W B Yeats, opening the well-thumbed pages to re-read my favourite poems. It was through Yeats' poetry that I first became interested in the Irish Twilight movement and via Yeats' that I was introduced to the plays of Lady Gregory and Synge and to the fiction of Sean O'Faolain. Indeed, such was my Irishmania that during the 40s I translated *Riders to the Sea* into Arabic for Radio Cairo.

This period of Irish history has always fascinated me, and one of the best ways for anyone unfamiliar with the period to get to know its leading characters is through the biographies of Frank O'Connor. One such biography, *The Big Fellow*, deals with the life of the Irish nationalist Michael Collins, from his birth on a farm in West Cork in 1890 to his tragically early death, at the hands of his former colleagues in the nationalist movement, in 1922.

Michael Collins, a man whose name, for complicated reasons, was all but erased from history, has, it seems, been rediscovered, as I was delighted to discover when, reading the British papers, I came across a review of a new film by Neil Jordan, director of the well-received *The Crying Game*, based on his life.

The film is, apparently, causing something of a stir in both the UK and Ireland. The British seem intent on continuing to view Collins as a terrorist while the Irish insist that he was no more than a traitor.

Yet to write off the film as "an IRA one", which is what the director thinks is happening in England, is just plain inaccurate. As Jordan says: "To call Michael Collins an IRA film is contemptible. Some of Yeats' poetry covered the same period. Is it known to be called IRA poetry?"

Jordan is perfectly right. And indeed, *Easter 1916*, with which Yeats opens a sequence of poems dealing with the period, is one of my favourites.

The poem was written on 25 September 1916, just a few days after the infamous events it describes, events that, as Yeats famously stated, changed the situation utterly, events out of which "a terrible beauty was born".

Collins was to some a freedom fighter, to others a terrorist. Such is the fate of the members of nationalist movements the world over. It all, of course, depends on whose side you are on. But what makes Collins something of a unique figure, however, is that while he was prepared to fight against overwhelming odds — he is the British — he was also prepared, and more importantly, psychologically capable, of searching for a peaceful resolution to the problems of Ireland.

This column is neither the place — nor the space — to go into the history of the Irish Nationalist movement. It is perhaps enough to record Collins' own words upon signing the peace treaty he had negotiated. Then, he said: "I have just signed my own death warrant."

And how right he was. "The power of Collins myth," writes the reviewer of Jordan's film, "is not what he did — though he was a legend in his time — but what he might have done if he lived. The tragedy is that he might not be going off in London if he had."

O'Connor ends his biography of Collins with a sentence I have always found explicitly moving: "It seemed as if life could never be the same again. The greatest oak in the forest had crashed and it seemed it must destroy all life in its fall."

Mursi Saad El-Din

EXCERPTS

While full details of the festival programme were unavailable at the time of going to press, a number of intriguing plays appear to be being staged. Below is a list of possible highlights, shows that you might well look out for out of the 63 productions that will be on offer.

The American Buffalo
Cypriot Theatre Organisation Company, Cyprus, dir. C. Arvanitis

David Mamet's pungent play, one of the most striking products of American theatre to emerge in at least two decades, castigates — comically and tragically — the tendency to view every aspect of human interaction as a business transaction. A play that, initially, appears to be about nothing, in particular develops into an unrelenting critique of the consequences of late capitalism.

Pantomime
Pantomime, Romania, dir. Dan Daria

Four actresses and four actors singingly medley down from pantomime, the comically didactic and popular theatre, where in two routines and more classical choreography, and the result? According to the company's own blurb, it is nothing less than a scathing parody on contemporary political life.

Macbeth
Brussels II, Ukraine, dir. Basil Chabanyuk

Seven different versions of Macbeth, simultaneously and sequentially presented, explore a bloody compelling drama: seven video films of the play, filmed from three different points of view while four actors present yet another version and yet another perspective.

Dreams about Chekhov
Odessa Experimental Theatre Company, Ukraine, dir. Boris Isin



UK entry *Rainbow Ice*, performed by Perpetual Motion; Singapore's *Descendants of the Eunuch*; Egypt's *Kaspar*, performed by Rebellion Theatre



A Modern Woman
Abelton Sui Hengnam, Malaysia

Mixing the conventions of Western and Asian theatre in the construction of a broken narrative, this Malaysian troupe attempt to re-examine the dilemmas faced by a working class woman who is a member of a society whose modernising programme, more often described as an economic miracle, can have disturbing and dehumanising results.

The Gathering of the Clan
Abidgroma — National Theatre of Ghana, dir. Yaw Adu

Described in its publicity as "an experiment in West African



Folk Theatre, the production mixes dialogue, story-telling, music and dance in "an arresting, dynamic scenario typifying the experiences of a West African community".

Descendants of the Eunuch
Theatre Works Ltd, Singapore, dir. Ong Keng Sen

Ancient Chinese court practices and the career of the eunuch Admiral Cheng Ho, responsible for China's most costly maritime adventure in the 15th century, a sound track that includes both Merodith Monk and Patti and a backdrop of projected computer graphics combine to draw parallels between today's office politics and the ancient Chinese custom of castration.

Alma mia Volante e Futurista

Associazione Culturale Stampa Alternativa, Italy, dir. Marco Chelari

Adapted from *Eight Souls Inside a Bomb* (Alma Exploding), written in 1919 by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, inventor and propagandist of Futurism, the Italian entry — which translates as 'On my soul, so vulnerable and flammable — is a one man show performed by Antonia Vito Mago.

Midsummer Madness
Passepartout Fillesse, Germany, dir. Andrea Papp

Adapted by the group from *A Midsummer's Night Dream* Bottom and his gang of mechanicals moving out into the world of modern dance, rock music and body language analysis.

The Detention of the Chaperon's Strangling Act
Technical University of Lisbon Theatre Group, Portugal, dir. Jorge Litagad

As once a portrait of German occupied Serbia and a picture of life in contemporary Senegal, the Portuguese entry examines the struggle between politics and artistic expression.

Live Acts of Love
Ab Na Ba Ensemble, US, dir. Jean Johnson and Lauren Wilson

Co-written and directed by two ensemble members, *Live Acts of Love* is an all women show which places the same five characters in two very different situations.

Thais
Edits Braun Company, Austria, dir. Edits Braun

Thais, the fiery queen of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, is often taken as a portrayal of Elizabeth I. In the current, Austrian production another Elizabeth, Austro-Hungarian empress, is associated with Shakespeare's character, in a performance that bills itself as "a portrait in movement".

Neglected and forgotten, home to the greatest level of poverty, the highest unemployment and the fewest services in the country, Upper Egypt stands at the brink of despair. The decline of militant Islamist violence during the past two years is no cause for complacency. Egypt can no longer afford to forget its south. President Mubarak has declared the coming two decades the "decades of developing the south". LE100 billion are to be spent on development in Upper Egypt. In this, and three subsequent issues, *Al-Ahram Weekly* takes an in-depth look at Upper Egypt, uncovering the roots of "deadly despair" and tracing the efforts and the will to generate a new hope.



photo: Jihan Ammar

The south recalled

Making the future into a site of hope

In Upper Egypt, development means survival. Omayma Abdel-Latif finds out why

For 29-year-old Hassan Harbi, a resident of Al-Nawawra village in Assiut, the worst days are about to be over. Recently Harbi managed to find a LE200 (approx. \$60) per month job with a community development project and he will soon lose his long-held status as unemployed.

Although his newfound employment has ushered in some feelings of relief, Harbi still wishes he could find something more suited to his education. "Without hope for the future, hard work at a low-paying job makes no sense," he says.

In 1990, Harbi graduated from Assiut University's Faculty of Engineering. Since then, he has tried everything to find work. "I used to queue up with dozens of other people at the gates of a sugar factory to look for work. I was feeling very stressed because I had a family to feed and finding a job is not an easy thing in a village like ours," Harbi recalled.

Now, the engineer says he has given up sifting through the daily newspapers' classified section — a ritual he has performed since graduation — and resigned himself to the fact that employment opportunities for civil engineers in Upper Egypt are in extremely short supply, if they exist at all.

Harbi's simmering discontent is shared with about six million Egyptians who are branded as "ultra poor" — their incomes are lower than a third of the national average and many live on a quarter of a dollar a day or less, according to research conducted by Marcelo Giugale, World Bank senior economist, and Hamed Mubarak, secretary of Egypt's Private Sector Development Committee.

Although 40 per cent of the ultra poor live in Upper Egypt, development schemes have been slow to reach the region. Giugale and Mubarak found that the poor in Upper Egypt are characterised by larger and younger households with a high incidence of disability and malnutrition as well as high morbidity and mortality rates. In many parts of the governorates of Assiut, Sohag, and Qena, there is little or no access to safe drinking water.

With an annual per capita income averaging \$330 a year, adult illiteracy rates hovering around 62 per cent and soaring unemployment rates, Upper Egyptians are losing hope for the future.

"The deadliest disease is despair. Poverty is only a symptom," asserts Mohamed Abul-Isaad, history professor at Minya University. "The lack of any governmental attention to development has created a vast new underclass which has no stake in the society or the government," he explains.

In recent years, these poverty pockets have become a breeding ground for the resurgence of militant groups which challenged the government and claimed Islam is the only solution. The government's slowness in implementing development projects in the south has heightened the attraction of radical Islam and exacerbated an increasingly vengeful conflict between security forces and militant groups.

"Terrorism has been a protest against the status quo," says Abul-Isaad.

And, he added, since "the government could not tackle the problem at its source, it reacted by cracking down on extremists."

But it is obvious, according to Hisham Gad El-Moula, a resident of Abu Qurqus in Minya Governorate, that the terrorism and violence in the south need more than just security measures — a fact that the government has only realised four years after the violence first began.

In an attempt to alleviate some of the area's economic and social woes and to put an end to the daily dose of bloodshed, the government has mapped out a national sustainable development programme for Upper Egypt spanning the next 22 years. Included are the southern parts of Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Qena, Aswan, El-Wadi El-Gedid and the Red Sea Governorate. The plan will serve 10 million Upper Egyptians who represent 17.2 per cent of the country's total population.

Just one year ago, President Hosni Mubarak declared the coming two decades as the "decades of developing the south". He also announced investment incentives with free land and tax exemp-

tions to attract private sector enterprises.

The government's plan will be carried out in four stages at a cost of \$60 to \$100 billion, according to Shura Council estimates from a March 1996 report. The report projects that 2.8 million job opportunities will be available while new agricultural and industrial ventures will employ another three million.

"People have been living under unbearable conditions. What has happened [the rise of militant Islam] was basically a result of the dire economic situation. This project is a remedy for decades of neglect," says Mahmoud Mahfouz, head of the Shura Council's Development Committee and architect

of the government's new development plan.

Mahfouz added that the poor distribution of financial resources allocated by the government, the population explosion and the reluctance of public and private investors have all contributed to a state of stagnation and weakened the country's development momentum.

A 200-plus-page report compiled by the Shura Council and a committee of the People's Assembly on development in Upper Egypt emphasises that the development of cultural services, human resources, tourism, security, health and industry should be given top priority. The report also recommends that the project's time frame should be shortened so that res-

idents can feel the tangible effects of the development process. It also emphasises security in Upper Egypt as a means of development.

"Unemployment, youth and culture are three main factors related to terrorism in the south. In addition to other factors, high rates of unemployment and lack of education and services have produced terrorism. So stability and security in the south are an important part of Egypt's stability," according to the report.

Shura Council member Nabil Babawy stresses that development in the south should focus on eradicating unemployment. For added momentum, he suggests stationing a minister in one of Upper Egypt's governorates.

Having one minister in any of the southern governorates will help drive forward the wheel of development. Decisions will be made faster and officials will have first-hand information on the nature of problems facing the people there instead of relying on reports," Babawy says.

One of the overall project's main goals is to attract investors to bring in capital for development. While the government will provide 25 per cent of the project's funding — in the form of six industrial complexes in the southern governorates in addition to the basic infrastructure — the private sector is expected to share the remaining 75 per cent. Approval was given to 369 new projects worth LE269 million proposed by investors, creating 166,880 job opportunities.

But according to one businessman, one possible way to encourage investors to head south is to provide them with the basics in security, communications, transportation and infrastructure.

"The case in Egypt has been always the other way around — establishing factories and projects has always come before laying down the necessary infrastructure, roads, communication, and transportation," notes Heshmat Abul-Kheir, a businessman from Sohag.

However, some expressed fears that the development process might place the south on a hamster's wheel: no matter how hard it runs, it never seems any closer to greater prosperity for the individual citizen.

"To us development means the price of bread and rice," said Gad El-Moula. "It is good to talk about plans for developing the long-forgotten south, but officials should know what people really need — sewage systems, clean water, schools and employment opportunities. We need to see that development is something that happens because of the poor and not in spite of the poor," he said.

The underdevelopment of Upper Egypt prompted satirical writer Ahmed Ragab to write, "We have to stretch our hands, like good neighbours do, to the state of Upper Egypt which is south of Cairo and belongs to the Fourth World. We have to change the concept that Upper Egypt is the exile of bad employees. If the government is taking care of the slums in the city, why doesn't it take care of the slum state south of Cairo which suffers from poverty, unemployment and terrorism?"

Hassan Shukry, history professor at the newly inaugurated Southern Valley University in Sohag, says "If we encourage the young people to believe in the future and give them solid evidence, such as development, we will find crime, poverty and the whole range of social ills shrinking to manageable proportions."



photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

The sun also rises

TWO organisations are carrying out social development projects in Upper Egypt. The Social Development Fund (SDF) helps individuals with loans and infrastructural work such as setting up sewage pipelines. The second project is "Shorouk" (Sunrise), which is the Rural Economic Development Project (REDP). Its aim is to raise the income of the individual, family and society through increasing production while minimising costs, diversifying sources of rural income, increasing permanent job opportunities and guaranteeing a fair distribution of income, according to Ibrahim Moharram, director of the programme.

The project is also based on the concept of local and popular participation in development projects. "The governmental efforts are supportive and complementary," Moharram told the *Weekly*.

"We need the local vision to be integrated with the governmental approaches of development because development is something we do for the people," he added.

The duration of Shorouk will be about nine years. The first year, which was 1995, saw the implementation of developmental schemes in 26 rural areas at a cost of LE168 million. Sources of finance come from the government which contributed LE228.8 million, non-governmental organisations contributing LE48.0 million, bank loans amounting to LE72.0 million and foreign donor contributions estimated at LE19.2 million.

Shorouk's agenda includes developing rural infrastructure including sanitation projects, health services, roads, transportation and communication, empowering women, rural industrialisation, increasing local investments and bridging wide gaps between income levels.

"We try as much as we can to raise the individual's social sense of responsibility through organised popular participation," said Moharram.

According to him, projects for sustainable development in a given rural area in Upper Egypt pass through five stages. The first focuses on exploring the area and setting up a socio-economic map for the community to outline its human resources, natural and material resources, available services, non-governmental organisations and a profile of societal values and customs.

The second stage concentrates on familiarising residents with development models and successful projects from nearby communities. The third phase involves formulating an agenda, while action begins in the fourth stage, followed by evaluation in the fifth.

For 1996, Shorouk is targeting the most destitute areas in the south like Matay in Minya, Abnub in Assiut, Draw village in Aswan and Dar El-Salam in Sohag.



photo: Emil Karam

The grapes of wrath

The confrontation between police and militants plays itself out like a traditional vendetta. Omayma Abdel-Latif looks inside the vicious circle

Three men sat next to 66-year-old Hajj Abdullah in the downtown Cairo office of the well-known Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya lawyer, Montasser El-Zayat. Hajj Abdullah was crying uncontrollably as he recounted the story of his 27-year-old son, Nasser, who is awaiting execution, having been convicted of participating in terrorist activities and attempting to murder a church guard in Aswan in 1993.

The three men near to him had good reason to empathise; they were experiencing the same ordeal of losing their sons to the ranks of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and most likely to the long days and longer nights of prison cells.

The strife plaguing Upper Egypt reached Edfu on 12 November 1993, when gunmen opened fire on a church guard and stole his weapon. Nasser, who studied medicine at Assiut University, was caught on the scene with an automatic rifle. According to newspaper reports, Nasser had been a member of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya for the past three years without his father's knowledge.

Nasser is but one of many university graduates recruited by militant groups which established their networks throughout much of Upper Egypt during the '80s and the early '90s.

Between 1992 and 1994, the same sad scene repeatedly played itself out in Upper Egypt: towns and villages were put under a virtual siege with police forces rounding up hundreds of suspected militants, around-the-clock curfews, and a daily dose of bloody confrontation which has claimed the lives of hundreds of militants, police and civilians caught in the crossfire.

By 1995 however, Upper Egyptians were already exhausted from years of fighting and as a result, violence began to subside. Harsh clamp downs on militant hideouts also led to a downturn in violence.

As compared to 1994, when 1,006 people were killed, less than 200 deaths were reported by the end of 1995. In July 1996, the number dropped further to 78.

The battle scars, however, are still very much there. And, according to many locals, there is no time to savour fragile peace. Anxiety and fear still reign in many parts of the south and the scattered incidents which occur add to people's fears.

The violence that still plagues the south is viewed by many experts on Islamist militancy as more than just a symptom of serious socio-economic malaise.

"It is an identity crisis," says Abdel-Mo'ati Shaarawi, sociology professor at Cairo University. "They do not feel they belong to the country because in the south, justice is denied, poverty is enforced, ignorance prevails and people feel that society is conspiring to oppress, rob, and degrade them, so neither person nor property will be safe," Shaarawi explains.

According to Shaarawi, the majority of Upper Egyptians feel there is a distinct north-south divide in the country. Many believe that while the north is closer to the heart of the country's political and social life, the south is isolated. "These young men [the militants] seek revenge on a system that does not meet their basic needs," he said.

The assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat in October 1981 heralded a new chapter in militant Islamist violence in the country. It was only in the late '80s however that the militants could launch a full campaign of armed violence. "Until 1987, the second generation of both the Gama'a and Jihad groups was still in the making and this might explain why there were hardly any terrorist attacks in southern governorates during the '80s," said Hafez Abu Sa'eda, member of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR).

The militants launched what amounted to an all-out campaign of armed attacks at the end of the '80s and early '90s. The security forces struck back with great severity. Gradually, the confrontation began to take the form of a traditional vendetta battle.

"If a terrorist was killed, his family which had not been involved previously, would feel bound to avenge him. And if the family does not, the Gama'a's will. It is a vicious circle and the government should be partly blamed for it since they did not consider the norms of the south in their battle against terrorism," said criminologist Soud El-Sharkawi.

Mohamed Eid, a member of the ruling National Democratic Party and head of the city council of Dairout, a city in Assiut Governorate, is also critical of the way government bodies handled the rise of militant Islamism in Upper Egypt. He especially blamed the ministries of interior and al-awqaf (Religious Endowments). In the absence of government-appointed sheikhs, he explained, extremists took over mosques and used them to propagate their seditious ideas.

"This occurred under the very eyes of the police and the preachers of the Awqaf Ministry, who ignored dozens of cables from the townspeople requesting assistance to deal with the extremists," Eid said. The village of Sanabu, close to Dairout, was literally under the control of *amir al-gama'a*, the local leader of the Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, he added.

Awqaf preachers interviewed by the Weekly said they did not realise the scope of the extremists' plan until Islamists began attacking Christians, tourists and civilians. But in their own turn they blamed what they alleged was excessive police force for the spiral of violence.

Human rights organisations make the same charge. For the past four years, these groups have repeatedly accused security forces of unlawfully re-

sorting to excessive force in hunting down Islamist militant suspects.

Wide scale and harsh crackdowns, mass arrests and the burning of thousands of square kilometres of sugarcane plantations — traditional terrorist hideouts — with no compensation to the farmers, have fuelled further traditional feelings of mistrust that have long characterised Upper Egyptians' relations with the central government in the north.

A police officer in Abu Qurgas, in Minya Governorate, admitted that the police resorted to tough measures against the militants. "But the existence of some excesses should not colour our judgement of the police's success in the battle," he said. "Without tough measures the police in the most advanced states of the world would fail in confronting terrorism."

So far there has been no treatment of the root causes of terrorism, according to Sultan Abu Ali, former economy minister and a long-time resident of Assiut. Until this happens, he pointed out, the problem will most likely persist.

"It is very deceptive to think the battle is over. The militants are still able to carry out major operations which means they still enjoy widespread influence," he warned.

Abu Ali explained, "Corruption and terrorism are linked. The way to eradicate the remaining pockets of terrorism is for top government officials to cut down on their conspicuous consumption. They should show some respect for everyone else. They should know that the people of the south are not naive or stupid."

"The young educated men who have remained idle for years with no hope for the future are like time-bombs. Unless the security apparatus realises it is time to use a new technique, it is very difficult to predict the end of this conflict," he said.

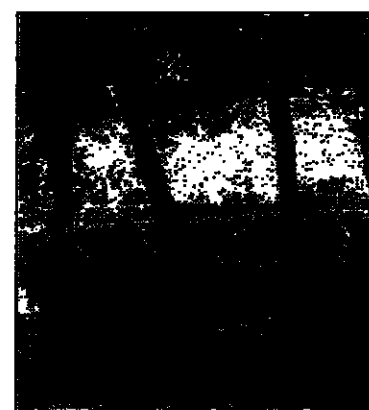


photo: Antoine Albert

'Unemployment, youth and culture are three main factors related to terrorism in the south. In addition to other factors, high rates of unemployment and lack of education and services have produced terrorism. So stability and security in the south are an important part of Egypt's stability'

Shura Council report



photo: Aref Saadeh

An eye for an eye

Family vendettas had been claiming their toll of victims long before militant Islam came upon the scene. Sahar El-Bahr investigates

One of the less salubrious aspects of living in Upper Egypt is the age-old practise of an eye for an eye. Upper Egypt is no longer that remote part of Egypt where illiteracy and superstition prevail; electricity lights up the villages and thousands of students are graduated from universities and schools annually.

Yet, the practice of vendetta remains deeply woven into the fabric of life, accounting for the highest percentage of crime. The custom is so prevalent in the region that even women and children have carried out vendettas.

"I am proud of killing him, I shall never regret it. It would have been a disgrace not to do it," boasted 12-year-old Mohamed Abdel-Azim. The boy had shot dead a 63-year-old man to avenge the murder of his father. Urged on by neighbours and relatives — aware of juvenile delinquency laws — Mohamed broke into the home of Mahmoud Hashim Nasser and shot him in the forehead with a shotgun. Nasser's son had been imprisoned for the killing of Abdel-Azim's father three months earlier.

Fawzi El-Oumda, dean of the High Institute for Sociology, believes that the act of murdering not only the person who killed, but the head of his family, has historical roots. Eliminating the head of the household brought on the utmost damage economically and socially to the family. However, due to the high rate of intermarriage this tended to enlarge the scale of conflict to include whole villages. Family members have even been known to wait years for the opportunity to avenge loved ones,

waiting until the perpetrator has served his prison sentence or, in more extreme cases, deliberately committing a crime in order to get into the prison to fulfil the vendetta.

One of the largest vendetta tragedies in recent memory occurred last year in El-Minya. The blood-letting began after a confrontation between two rival families over the disappearance of a member of one of the families. The show down lasted five hours and left 28 persons dead and 17 injured. The massacre, though noteworthy for the high number of casualties, is just an example of dozens of vendetta cases in Upper Egypt.

Over the first five months of 1996, 44 cases were registered with the General Security Department (GSD), an authority of the Interior Ministry. GSD records show that there were 117 vendetta crimes committed in 1995 and 112 in 1994.

"There are even highly educated Upper Egyptians who seek revenge or urge other people to carry it out," said Major General Nasser Zaher, head of the GSD.

However, Zaher is quick to point out that the percentage of vendetta murders has decreased as a result of back and forth Upper Egyptian migration to urban areas where people tend to become more enlightened.

Abdel-Rehim El-Ghoul, a People's Assembly member and the head of the Sports and Youth Committee in the chamber, agrees with Zaher that the number of vendettas has decreased, attributing this to the development plans taking place in

Upper Egypt.

"People began enjoying their lives as it became easier and more cultured and educated," El-Ghoul told the Weekly. "Now there is electricity, water, paved roads, modern equipment, schools, universities, newspapers, TV and radio. The people themselves have realised that the act of vendetta is a tradition they must give up."

Still many remain unsatisfied with the assumption that development in Upper Egypt will eventually lead to the disappearance of vendetta crimes.

"Whenever I go to Upper Egypt I feel that I have travelled back two centuries," said Ahmed El-Magdoub, professor at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research. Vendetta, he believes, has economic, social, cultural and even political roots.

"The development taking place now is neither tangible nor sufficient. The life of Upper Egyptians is still full of problems including illiteracy, pollution, ignorance, negligence, poverty, and disease," El-Magdoub complained.

Among those who feel that there is still an enormous role to be played by the state concerning development in Upper Egypt is Ahmed Askar, professor of sociology at Sobha University. "The rate of vendettas is higher in Qena where there are only very few development projects. Another problem is that the budget allocated for education especially universities, is very low," Askar told the Weekly. Further exacerbating the situation is the Islamist presence in Upper Egypt which has spawned the

"political vendetta" in which security personnel are murdered by the families of militants killed in police operations. The police recourse on occasion to different forms of collective punishment against residents of villages or urban quarters in which the militants have a strong base, has resulted in an increase in political vendettas, said Askar.

Hamdi Radwan, an Upper Egyptian physician, asserts that there are whole families who have joined the ranks of Islamist militants, not because they are convinced of their ideas but to protect and support members of their families. "After all, it is a tribal society where the individual gets his social status from that of his family," added Radwan.

The social prestige of acquiring weapons has created a situation where hardly a household is without at least one gun.

"Money, weapons and family are the elements of power. We are all used to having weapons," said Nadia Ibrahim, a housewife. El-Magdoub agrees. "The most prestigious families are the ones who have up-to-date weapons to the extent that some of them have automatic weapons."

But Askar believes that as time goes by, Upper Egyptians are realising that revenge is not the answer. He noted that before the last People's Assembly elections, the number of reported vendetta cases dropped significantly. In Sokag, he said, the tradition is gradually disappearing.

El-Ghoul stressed that development is inspiring the desire for peaceful living. "People are keen on keeping their educated sons alive."

'We have to stretch our hands, like good neighbours do, to the state of Upper Egypt which is south of Cairo and belongs to the Fourth World'

Ahmed Ragab
Columnist at Al-Akhbar

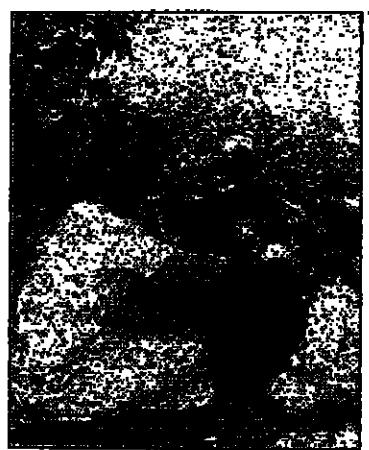


photo: Nour Sahab

'The deadliest disease is despair. Poverty is only a symptom'

Mohamed Abul-Isaad
History professor at Minya University



Zar ceremonies: Exorcising evil spirits or treating hysteria?

Pot Pourri

Paradise lost (1)

Unlike many of my classmates, whose parents had given in to the trend and sold their villas, moving into modern apartments in more fashionable suburbs, I grew up in Dokki, in a real house complete with a small garden, a paradise for any child.

In those days, Dokki was a residential area, if not exactly the wildest part of town. It was rather on the quiet side, sporting only lots of trees and unpretentious villas. Mohamdesin did not exist, then. In its place lay vegetable fields in which we went for long walks and where I tasted raw peas for the first time. For us children, Mohamdesin, which was not designated by any particular name, represented the countryside as opposed to the city.

In between lay Dokki, with its mimosa-lined footpaths and its pink, green and yellow stucco houses, surrounded by tiny little patches of grass, flowers and exotic trees, and guarded by policemen sitting in the little wooden cabins which dotted the pavements. Every year, our street was recovered with a fresh layer of asphalt, a momentous event for us, worth watching in its every detail.

This special attention was probably due to the fact that Ahmed Maher, Ali Maher's brother, lived a few blocks away from us. The day he was shot, large trucks unloaded what seemed like a sea of yellow sand with which the whole street was covered in honour of the king, who was coming to pay his condolences to the family. Exceptionally, on that day, we were given permission to stand in the street outside the gate, duly escorted by all the servants, to watch the motorcade.

As the red cars solemnly slid past our observation post, I suddenly noticed a shadow behind the glass. I convinced myself that I had recognised the king. At this moment an old man standing next to me spat in the direction of the motorcade, muttering: "God will make you pay for all the evil you have brought upon this country." I was indignant. I had been taught to respect our ruler. Besides, I had just seen him with my own eyes. "You should not say that," I boldly told the old man — (we were strictly forbidden to speak to strangers) — "He is your king." The old man smiled and patted me on the head, but said nothing. A moment later he had disappeared.

Things, however, were not often as exciting in our neck of the woods. In fact, it was a rather deserted part of the city with less than its fair share of traffic and, except for the ambulant puppet show and the old organ-grinder with his monkey, events seemed to be passing it by. When Cairo was set afire, we did not even see the smoke and, had we not overheard the servants, we children would have remained oblivious to the event.

As children, then, our only adventures took place in the garden. It was not a very large garden, and I have always wondered why it occupied such an important place in our lives. During my entire childhood — and maybe beyond — I always thought of it as a magic place. In summer the mixture of fragrances was positively heady. Every tree was different and had a life of its own. There was the towering magnolia which produced incredibly delicate chalcids that the gardeners, standing on the tallest ladder I had ever seen, cut with garden shears — an instrument we were not to touch under any circumstance — and brought ceremoniously into the house.

Some years this giant of a tree would only produce a single bloom and everyone in the house would be distressed, casting worried glances at it and muttering that the tree was uttering its swan song. The year after, however, it would still be standing, majestically tall, albeit still parsimonious with its offerings. My mother would place the bloom(s) into a vase and the whole house would smell almost as good as when there were mangoes in the fruit bowl.

Another heady fragrance came from all the jasmine that grew everywhere, covering the wrought-iron fence and spilling into the street. I loved to bury my face in its branches and take deep, inebriating breaths. The gardeners had planted, full next to the gate and, in season, as soon as he heard my father coming down the steps, he would pluck a single sweet-smelling, cabbage-like, white bloom and offer it to him with a flourish. In those years the full was strictly reserved for my father, and the gardeners would come running every time we came near his saplings. Long after my father's death, I came home from a trip that had lasted many years and the same gardeners, stooped but not much worse for the wear, welcomed me with a full flower, his way of acknowledging the changing of the guards, perhaps. The gardeners had died since, but I still have the blossom, pressed in a book somewhere.

Fayza Hassan

Busting the ghost-busters

When it comes to the benefits of science over sorcery, Mariz Tadros discovers that the medical community is as divided as it is skeptical

Seeing may be believing, but when it comes to doctoring, practitioners of alternative medicine argue that believing may also lead to curing. Or at least, they would have argued this had the conference entitled, "Treatment through the realm of the unknown," actually been held as scheduled in Cairo's Qasr El-Aini Hospital.

The decision by Dr. Mo'az El-Sherbini, dean of Cairo University's Medical School, to cancel the conference, which was to include faith healers, religious men and parapsychologists from around the world, brought to a head the debate between medical doctors and practitioners of folk and alternative medicines such as acupuncture, homeopathy and religious incantations. The viability of employing these methods of treatment within the realm of hard science was to be discussed.

El-Sherbini denied, in a conversation with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, that the conference was cancelled, since, he maintained, it was never scheduled. Alternative medical cures are particularly popular among members of the lower class, who often cannot afford standard medical care or simply have little faith in it.

"This is a respectable medical institution, and the idea that we may even contemplate holding a conference on magic is ludicrous," he said. "And, if Dr. Said Thabet feels that magic has anything to contribute to medicine, this is his own business and his own belief, and in no way reflects those upheld by Qasr El-Aini as an institution." El-Sherbini's beliefs are by no means unique. They are shared by many others in the medical profession who maintain that "snake oil" cures are not only illegal, but also potentially harmful to the patient.

Said Thabet, a professor of gynecology and obstetrics at Qasr El-Aini who was to chair the conference, remains convinced of the healing powers of the mind in cases where modern medicine seems to have reached an impasse.

According to Thabet, the cancellation of the conference came as a surprise given that "we held a previous one in May, at the hospital, which was attended by several prominent doctors, to discuss the theories behind alternative medicine."

"The spirit of the conference existed long before the actual conference was to be held," he

told the *Weekly*. "It will continue until a decision on the use of alternative medicine is reached at the highest level in the Medical Faculty of Cairo University and the other universities."

Although many in the medical profession liken these kinds of conferences to seances or exorcism rituals, Thabet insists that what this conference dealt with was alternative medicine, not magic.

"Do you think that I, Dr. Said Thabet, the renowned professor of gynecology and obstetrics, who has undertaken tremendous amounts of research in sexology and metaphysical medicine, as well as being an expert in antiquities, could be called upon by people who want to hold a seance? This is completely unrelated to my interests," he stressed.

For a professor of medicine to be associated on a professional level with *afreet* or evil spirits and sorcery is anything but flattering. Consequently, during an interview at his clinic in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Cairo, Thabet stressed that he is not interested in finding the "source of the magic, no, sorry, alternative medicine," but in treating the symptoms of the problem. Despite his best efforts, phrases like "being possessed" and "being placed under a spell" find their way into the conversation.

"Magic," he said, before backtracking and replacing the word with the phrase "metaphysical forces," is "any unknown factor causing socio-medical disassociation or pure medical disease." The essence of magic, according to Thabet, lies in the use of electromagnetic waves which emanate from one person to another, with the aim of either healing or harming him.

"For example, while I am sitting here now, I can direct a wave from my mind at you which would prevent you from sleeping tonight. It's easy," he stated. "Also, by using electromagnetic waves, I can find out exactly what you're thinking... or I can move something by concentrating on it and releasing these waves."

The aim of the conference and the 1,300 page document Thabet sought to present to the medical school at Qasr El-Aini, was to introduce "a purified version of magic into the medical curriculum."

"We are not trying to impose the study of magic on medical students," he said. "We are simply

saying that it should be introduced as an option for doctors who would like to treat patients in this manner. This would also put an end to the need for people to go to outside, illegal sources, since qualified medical professionals would be available."

Qasr El-Aini, Thabet noted, already owns equipment that can detect electromagnetic waves passing through the heart, brain or muscles. "I have identified what I call the 'mg wave'. This is a magnetic wave stemming from magic. An 'mg wave' appearing under a pure magnetic force machine indicates that the person is under a spell," explained Thabet.

According to books on the occult and the supernatural, in order to protect a person from falling under a spell before marriage or after a birth, certain rituals or rites must be observed. Performing these same rituals is an integral part of breaking spells, especially if the specific cause of the problem cannot be ascertained.

"For example," recalled Thabet, "I treated a man who was married for nine months and had not been able to consummate his marriage. Every time he approached his wife, in his eyes, she appeared to be a monkey chained to the bed. He would run away. He sought psychological help, but could still not find a cure. In the end, I advised his wife to have a henna night."

"Now, they lead a perfectly normal married life," states Thabet, who also claims to have successfully treated cases of male impotence, hemorrhaging, and sexual dysfunction.

If doctors were skilled in the field of magic, he noted, they would be able to identify from the beginning whether a patient was suffering from a legitimate medical problem or was under a spell. Dr. Ahmed Okasha, president of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association and the Association of Arab Psychiatrists, is convinced that doctors who combine medicine with the supernatural are little more than quacks.

The lure of such a cure, argued Okasha, stems from a patient's blind confidence in the healer, irrespective of how irrational the cure or method of treatment seems.

"It's sad that in a country like ours there are still people, even medical professionals, who hold on to such superstitions," he stated. Possibly, suggested Okasha, one of the main reasons

some doctors develop an interest in the healing powers of *daggaleen* (practitioners of witchcraft) and sheikhs, is that many of their patients have already visited these healers before coming to the clinics. In a study conducted on 100 women who took part in zar ceremonies, 96 per cent appeared to be suffering from psychiatric problems which caused people to think they were possessed — even though eight per cent of them were university students.

"For the majority of my patients, I am their last resort after popular (alternative) methods have failed," noted Dr. Ahmed Abdallah, a psychiatrist at the Mokattam Mental Health Hospital. Some patients who suffer from emotional disorders find comfort in amulets and zar ceremonies simply because their belief in the healing powers of the occult is so strong, he added. The driving force behind the popularity of these forms of healing, explained Abdallah, is the principle of "plasmidia" — where the power of believing is so strong that "an impotent man is healed once a *daggal* or witch doctor tells him that the *a' mal* or spell that he had been suffering under has been lifted."

Nonetheless, Abdallah is reluctant to give alternative medicine carte blanche. "I've had patients who were sexually abused by those who claim to have power over *afreet*," he recalled. "And others who have been beaten senseless during the alleged battle to exorcise a spirit."

The Doctors' Syndicate is equally adamant. "I personally believe that any doctor who resorts to unscientific methods in the treatment of his patients should be expelled from the syndicate," said Dr. Omar Shaheen, a professor of psychiatry and deputy of the Doctors' Syndicate. He noted that the syndicate was not informed about the conference. "These [forms of treatment] run counter to a doctor's duty to use proven methods of treatment." Furthermore, he added, using these methods is an indication of the ignorance rampant in our society.

"It is more practical for a villager, to go to a *daggal* than to a psychiatrist whose powers he doubts and who also costs more," said Shaheen. He added that instead of promoting these kinds of treatments, the government should work to upgrade the quality of psychiatric care in Egypt, making it more accessible to the general public.

Supra Dayma

Koshari with yellow lentils

Ingredients:
2 cups yellow lentils
1 cup rice
4 onions (coarsely chopped)
3 cups water
Corn oil
Salt + cumin

Method:
Wash the rice and soak it in hot water for 15 minutes. Strain it and wash the lentils, then mix them together. In a cooking pan, heat two tablespoons of corn oil, then add the water, the salt and cumin, and bring to boil. Add the rice and lentils, stir them in the water and cover the pan. When the liquid is absorbed, lower the heat, stir again gently, cover again and place the pan over a simmering ring and leave to cook. In the meantime, fry the onions until crispy brown and strain over kitchen blotting paper. Take half the quantity of the onions and stir it well within the rice and lentils which should by then be almost cooked. Mix well together, cover and leave for ten more minutes. Remove from heat and leave to rest for five minutes, then pour the *koshari* in a serving plate. Sprinkle the remaining fried onions on top and serve hot with a rich green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sunshine and smiles

Nigel Ryan on the snack bar's latest emanation

Whatever happened to the snack bar? The very term seems somehow antique. Those pre-franchise fast food outlets, with sandwiches and fizzy drinks and surly waitresses and thick cups full of frothing coffee are stuck forever in an age of innocence, pre-dating the knowingsness of the burger. They are positively antediluvian, and were practically extinguished by the flood that brought with it a tidal wave of fillet o' fish and its derivatives.

This is something of a pity. But snack bars do, thankfully, appear to be making a re-appearance, in the most unlikely guises and the least expected places.

The catering outlet run by the bakery chain La Poire, on the ground floor of the World Trade Centre, is one such emanation. It is, to all intents and purposes, nothing more or less than a good, old-fashioned snack bar, minus the surly waitresses, of course, but with a wide array of sandwiches — both hot and cold — and some startling fizzy drinks.

One such item, the curiously named sunshine, looks deceptively innocuous in an otherwise predictable list of drinks. It was too intriguing to miss, and so was duly ordered, along with a smoked salmon sandwich. My snacking companion ordered a La Poire hot dog, something I could not quite contemplate, but which described itself as a hot dog sausage served in a sesame bun with brown onion gravy.

The smoked salmon sandwich arrived — large, rather generously filled, in slightly messy white bread with capers and a few slices of onion. (One small gripe, not directed at La Poire, but at suppliers of capers. Why are the capers

so often bottled in brine, they at least taste like capers. In vinegar, they might as well be *torshi*.)

I confess that I did not taste the hot dog. It, too, was a substantial looking thing. The brown onion gravy was really a pale beige. But after dousing the object in mustard my companion ate it with a suitable display of relish. He, a regular snacker, and far from unfamiliar with this particular outlet, invariably orders this particular sandwich. So there you go.

Now to the sunshine. Fizzy lemonade, with lime juice and grenadine — an oleaginous mixture that looked positively post-nuclear when it arrived. Heady stuff, this sweet, sticky, fizzy cup. Hardly the most sophisticated of concoctions but then this is a snack bar, and sophistication is not its stock in trade.

It is not that they do not make an effort. The wrought iron chairs are fashionably distressed. The table tops are polished marble. The space is uncluttered, the waiters efficient, the service quick. But with a huge, man-size polystyrene baguette hanging from the ceiling, filled with what resembled, if it resembled anything, a profuse harvest festival offering, such superficial niceties pale into insignificance.

This particular snack outing was supplemented by two orders of French fries and one of onion rings. Predictable, fast food fare. The espresso that followed was excellent, and the bill, when it came, which in the end covered what was really a substantial lunch for two, was less than LE30. So roll out the sunshine.

La Poire, World Trade Centre (ground floor), Corniche El-Nil

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

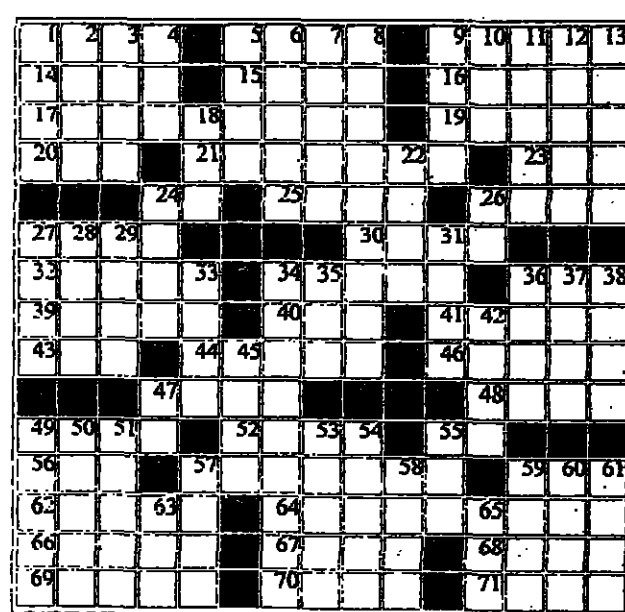
By Samia Abdenour

ACROSS

1. Spanish home (4)
2. Puncture (4)
3. Brawl; upheaval (5)
14. Famous Roman poet (4)
15. Stratagem; scheme (4)
16. Divide (5)
17. Botanic; inanimate (9)
19. Bury (5)
20. Sea eagle (3)
21. Devoid of life (7)
23. Before (3)
24. Either's partner (2)
25. Cobbler's tool, pl. (4)
26. ... and crafts (4)
27. Needy (4)
30. Covetousness (4)
32. Metropolitan (5)
34. Snapshot (5)
36. Headress (3)
39. Ladies' long outer garment (5)
40. Umpire, abb. (3)

DOWN

1. Inlet (4)
2. Certify (4)
3. Representation; initial (4)
4. Suffix-forming nouns (3)
5. Clean; nap (4)
6. Leg bone (5)
7. Give the go-ahead (5)
8. Depart, sl. 2 wds. (9)
9. Smart (4)
10. River in east central China (3)
11. Modify; transform (5)
41. Resemblance (5)
43. Weather directions (3)
44. Bandanna; box (5)
46. Port in Kent, England (5)
47. All-men gathering (4)
48. Under garment (4)
49. Jabbers (4)
52. Hit; struck (4)
55. Symbol for "iron" (2)
56. Pub drink (3)
57. Dramatic enigma (7)
59. Expression of contempt (3)
62. Dickens' Scrooge (5)
64. Art of stuffing and mounting animal skins (9)
65. Stimulate; summon (5)
67. One (4)
68. Mutilate (4)
69. Covered with indefinite number of stars (5)
70. Relinquish (4)
71. WWII gun (4)



12. Manifest; plain to see (5)
13. Catch of gun-lock holding hammer at full cock, pl. (5)
18. Pith (3)
24. Voiced (4)
26. Yes (2)
27. Hare or cat (4)
28. Crumbs (4)
29. Woodwind instrument (4)
31. Invalid; non-existent (4)
33. Snuggery (4)
34. Efficient; positive (9)
35. Personal pronoun (3)
36. Grotto (4)
37. Time and time again (4)
38. Smart-aleck (4)
42. Get along; activity (4)
45. Currency (4)
47. Nazi special police force, abb. (2)
49. Amusements (5)
50. Opposite of 21 across (5)
51. Type of broom made with twigs (5)
53. Very angry (5)
43. Levied (5)
55. Nourished (3)
57. North American Indian tribe (4)
58. American coin (4)
59. Urchin (4)
60. French girlfriend (4)
61. Religious song (4)
63. Supplement (3)
65. Pitting measure, pl. (3)

هكذا من الأصل

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The first lesson students of journalism learn is: "It is not news when a dog bites a man. News is when a man bites a dog!" This was not the maxim *Al-Ahram* followed on 30 August 1896 when, on its first page it published the following report from its correspondent in the capital:

"Last Saturday a heart-chilling incident occurred on Darb El-Ahmar and Al-Nasreya streets when a stray dog attacked and bit 13 children who were playing in the alleyways. Ultimately fate intervened and a guard killed the dog."

"The body of the dog was taken to the chemical laboratory to determine whether it was infected with rabies. Yet, even if it were discovered that it was infected with rabies, of what use would this knowledge be, since we do not have a hospital that treats the lethal disease?"

With this article, *Al-Ahram* opened a new chapter in Egyptian life: the relationship between man and animals. It is a subject that had made an impact in Europe only a few years previously when the famous French scientist Louis Pasteur discovered a serum to treat rabies.

That the Europeans should have taken the lead in this domain can be ascribed to their precedence in developing modern urban life, which in turn provided the occasion for stray animals to roam the cities. One would be far less likely to see this phenomenon in the countryside, particularly in Egypt, where the relationship between man and his animals is so close that they sometimes share the same roof.

Not so in Egypt's cities, which had undergone radical changes since the Mameluke era. As the medieval city opened up to the modern age, the old gates to separate residential quarters and alleyways came down, permitting the entrance of new social strata such as the "alley children". The formerly closed-off quarters also became a haunt for stray dogs and cats, with all the health risks they can pose to human beings. The 13 Darb Al-Ahmar children were not their first victims, nor would they be their last.

At the same time, the Europeans in Egypt opened the eyes of the Egyptians to the fact that not everyone bit by a rabid dog or cat was fated to die, particularly now that Pasteur and his colleagues had developed a successful serum. Moreover, there had arisen in Egypt new social classes capable of affording treatment in the clinics of Europe, notably Greece. It was in the capitals of Europe that the major research into protecting human beings from the health hazards posed by animals was being undertaken. At essence in this research was the spirit of man's humanity towards man, but contained within its folds was the humane treatment of animals.

With the growth of the newspaper industry contributing to the rise of a broader base of public opinion, issues such as this would make an impact on a larger sweep of the populace. By the last decade of the 19th century, the death of an individual as a result of the bite of a rabid dog was no longer just an incident felt within the con-

fines of the victim's family. News of the event would be disseminated around the country, provoking concern and anxiety and also action. It is here that we open the pages of *Al-Ahram* of 100 years ago to the emergence of the humane society in Egypt.

The chapter opens in Alexandria in 1894, three years after Pasteur's death, when a consortium of influential foreigners and Egyptians inaugurated Egypt's first humane society for the treatment of animals. *Al-Ahram* of 11 May of that year reports: "A society for the prevention of cruelty to animals has been founded in keeping with such developments in all civilised countries." The new society grouped a good selection of prominent Alexandrian citizens and dignitaries, including the governor of Alexandria and the Coptic Orthodox patriarch, in addition to other distinguished citizens of the port among whom were doctors, civil engineers and heads of commercial establishments.

The writer's enthusiasm for the project is evident from his commentary: "Indeed, Egypt is most deserving of such a society. How frequently have we seen poor animals made to carry far heavier loads than they can bear. How often have we seen these wretched beasts whipped in order to prod them forward when they are almost ready to keel over from weakness and emaciation."

From an article published several weeks later, we learn that Sir Charles Crickson, the British consul-general in Alexandria, was the chairman of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. On 18 July the newspaper reports that it had received the charter of the society, which was referred to this time as "The Society for the Protection of Animals". From this report, we also learn that the society had 353 members, that the yearly subscription fee was 10 piastres and that it had elected the governor of Alexandria as its chairman.

In other *Al-Ahram* issues of the period we glean more about the society which had a predominantly European membership. The society soon established a hospital for the treatment of animals. Horses and mules cost 40 millimes to treat as opposed to 20 millimes for donkeys. It also began to intervene in the process of killing stray dogs, which had been one of the functions of the municipal authorities. The society advocated strangulation of these animals instead of poison, because they considered it less cruel.

In less than two years a counterpart to the society was founded in Cairo, as we learn from the following complaint that appeared in *Al-Ahram*: "The carriage that transports students from Shubra can barely make it up the Shubra Bridge as the carriage, filled with some 40 or more students, is only pulled by two weak and tired horses. We therefore ask the Humane Society for the Treatment of Animals to demand that at least one more horse be added to these vehicles."

As the establishment of humane societies for the treatment of animals spread, so too did the criticism they were subject to in the

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Emulating the European example, Egypt had its first society for the prevention of cruelty to animals in 1894, three years after the death of Louis Pasteur, the

French scientist who developed the anti-rabies serum. But it took about five years of pressure from the press and public opinion to prevail on the government, then dominated by the British who occupied Egypt, to build a rabies hospital to treat humans bitten by animals. The story of the campaign is told by Dr Yunan Labib Rizq in this instalment of Egypt's history as chronicled in reports published by *Al-Ahram*



Illustration: Makram Henin

name of humanity towards man. The first to voice objections was *Le Bosphore Egyptien*, a French-language newspaper, which wrote that it would be a worthier mission for the members of these societies to direct their concern "toward the conditions of poor and abandoned orphans rather than dumb beasts". Perhaps, the writer advises, they should change their name to societies "for the protection of animals and children" and work toward preventing the harsh treatment of children, "so that they do not avenge themselves on society when they grow up."

Al-Ahram adopted this cause as of the middle of 1897. In a lengthy article that appeared on 29 June it poses the question: "If those involved in these societies for the protection of animals against the cruelty inflicted upon them by man indeed felt for their fellow man, they would direct their concern to the protection of human beings before animals." The author took the occasion to note that Egypt lacked societies such as those existing in civilised countries which reward those "who save human lives from drowning, fires, and other such calamities of life. Even if the reward is no more than a medal, these heroes are remembered for their courage and kindness. Nothing of this sort exists in Egypt. The country which does not reward compassion, valour and humanity is lacking in virtue and in virtuous people."

As writers debated the morality of humanity towards man versus humanity to-

wards animals, new ideas surfaced in the press regarding ways to safeguard man from animals. At first this task fell upon the humane societies which had taken up the responsibility of exterminating animals that posed a risk to human life. *Al-Ahram* regularly featured the monthly reports of the societies, particularly the humane society in Alexandria where *Al-Ahram* was based before it moved to Cairo in November 1899. The society's statistics for July 1896, for example, tell us that of the 198 animals that were admitted to the animal hospital, 150 were cured, nine had to be shot and the remainder were still under treatment. The report for three months later cites 203 animals admitted for treatment, of which only three had to be shot. But the threat of rabies from cats and dogs still remained a problem of major concern.

As of 1897, the humane societies began to devote their energies to this concern. We read in *Al-Ahram* in the middle of that year that Alexandria's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals brought over from Europe large quantities of muzzles to distribute among the city's dog owners. We also come across an interesting report that an Arab tribe in the vicinity of Simbilawin had succeeded in concocting a herbal potion that cured rabies.

If these two articles tell us anything at all, it is that the risk of contracting rabies from stray animals was beginning to cause considerable public alarm, so much so that the Shura Legislative Council began to

take action. The initiative was taken by "the honourable Mohamed Bek Abu Nafie, a member of the Shura Legislative Council" who "petitioned the government in the name of the Council to include in its plans a project to build a hospital for rabies treatment." *Al-Ahram*, along with *Le Phare d'Alexandrie*, praised the initiative and urged the government to give it its due attention.

Unfortunately, the government did commit the "folly" of neglect and *Al-Ahram* was incensed. "Between 21 and 22 August, 22 individuals were infected with rabies in the districts of Al-Abasi, Al-Mahruqa and Bir Al-Assara in the administrative centre of Bilbais. Are our ministers going to wait until more than 22 people are afflicted and until all or most will die of this malignant disease before they are moved by a tremor of humane compassion and order the construction of a hospital for rabies?"

Over a year passed without a governmental response, provoking the Shura Council to renew its appeal in April 1898, touching off a new wave of public pressure.

Al-Ahram did not spare any punches on the issue. In one article it asked how the government could bring itself to plead lack of funds to build this much-needed hospital which would cost no more than LE1,200, "when it is building a villa for the dean of the Medical Faculty (Mr Keating) costing LE6,000 and a villa for another teacher (also British) worth LE3,000 and a house for the gardener costing LE1,000? The writer then suggests that the government should send the 13 boys to Athens for treatment at its own expense. To drive home the sarcasm, the author adds that the thirteen boys should carry with them a letter addressed to the Greek government saying: "I am Egypt, mother of wonders and marvels...and calamities. To you, our dear nearby kingdom, which is smaller and not as wealthy as just one of my provinces, unfazed by the palaces which I am building for some of our honoured foreigners, I send a score of young human beings who are being destroyed by the malicious disease of rabies. I therefore most humbly plead that you restore the health to these young boys who shall one day become my soldiers and members of my greater family and the builders of my future glory."

Evidently *Al-Ahram* was not alone in the plea to send the children to Europe to be treated. The pressures on the government were so formidable that the Health Authority, which was a subsidiary to the Ministry of the Interior at the time, succumbed and took the decision to send the children to Athens to be cured. The day after it was reported that the 13 children had been bitten, news came to light that the correct number of children in question was 17. The public was outraged and "the Honourable Mohamed Saber Pasha, the governor of the capital, has asked the government to act!" The following day, the children were sent off to Athens for treatment at government expense.

The gesture brought public censure, not against the gesture itself, but for the fact that the government's continued reluctance to build the rabies hospital necessitated this measure.

But the government's decision to send the boys abroad received its due share of acclaim as well. "We heartily praise the Council of Ministers for having taken this action," wrote *Al-Ahram*. Later, the newspaper also paid tribute to the hospital in Greece "for their excellent treatment of the infected children, all of whom returned to their homes fully restored to health."

Yet the conclusion of this incident did not end this chapter on "humanity towards one's fellow man". The risk of contracting rabies from stray dogs continued to trouble the Egyptian press, as represented by *Al-Ahram*, which published the following two news items in December 1898.

The first, from Zagazig, reported that a dog bit his owner, one of his owner's relatives and several members of his staff. "The dog was sent to Cairo for medical tests. As for those who were bitten, some travelled to Athens for treatment, although others are unable to do so."

The second item, from Cairo this time, reported that a dog bit four people in Old Cairo. "The government will send the Egyptians among them to the hospital in Athens for treatment at its own expense."

Although the British director of the Health Authority argued that sending rabies cases to Athens was cheaper than building a hospital in Cairo, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to maintain that stance, particularly when confronted by the arguments, such as that of *Al-Ahram*, that Athens has only 200,000 inhabitants as opposed to a million in each of Cairo and Alexandria. A rabies hospital in Egypt was a necessity, even if the government was unprepared to act. At the end of 1898 the government received two proposals. The first was submitted by a Greek doctor who offered to build a hospital "on the condition that the Egyptian government pay LE2,000 to its medical staff". The second was proposed "by the Italian Charity Society, which has pledged itself to undertake the task which the government has declared itself unable to perform, namely to construct a rabies hospital in Cairo."

The Health Authority jumped at the Italians' offer, since, after all, it would not incur any costs to the government. Shortly after it was approved, the Italian Charity Society sent a doctor to Paris for training in the rabies hospital there. Before the close of the century, the rabies hospital in Cairo had opened its doors in order to dispense, for the first time in Egypt, this form of humanitarian assistance.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Telephone service for villages

SOLIMAN Metwalli, minister of telecommunications, stated that 1996 is the year of village telephone service. The Egyptian Telecommunications Organisation has been exerting great efforts to carry out this policy adopted by the minister. The policy calls for providing telephone service and increasing the number of lines in villages throughout a number of governorates. Among the governorates containing villages slated for telephone service are: Kafr El-Sheikh, El-Daqqahliya, Sharqiyah, Dumyat, Qena, Minya, Assuit, Beni Suef, Sohag, El-Gharbiya and Menufiya.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Bridge project strengthens ties

WOLF SCHILLING, German ambassador in Cairo, said that Germany's involvement in the Damahour Bridge project currently underway, is considered an important step in strengthening ties between Egypt and Germany, explaining that the project consolidates ties between both countries through the private sector and different organisations. Schilling added that the new bridge is an important element in the large-scale project aimed at connecting the governorates by rail. The bridge is to be the link between North Sinai and the rest of the country.

NBE's eminent role in nurturing private sector cement production

AS THE National Bank of Egypt (NBE) thrusts forward in spearheading the gradual transition towards universal banking extending classical and non-traditional services and following government policy in punching its weight against developing Upper Egypt, the bank, together with the Egyptian Union for Building and Construction, have elaborated technical, economic and financial studies deemed necessary for the construction of a private sector cement plant in Koft, Qena Governorate. It is envisaged to be a joint stock Egyptian company in accordance with Law 230 of 1989.

The project is to be established in the Wadi Soudos area, north east of the Koft/El-Koseir road in Qena Governorate, covering an area of about

4mn sq metres. It is worth mentioning that the said land is a free grant from the governorate which has a number of advantages, namely bounteous limestone, the key raw material for production, underground water, electricity, gas, oil and multiple roads facilitating the transfer of production.

The issued capital is estimated at around LE300mn, distributed among 300mn shares each valuing at LE10. The said amount is envisaged to be covered by prime contracting firms, members in the Egyptian Union for Building and Construction, some local banks and investors. Moreover, a portion is to be offered for public subscription. It is agreed that NBE's share would hover around 10 per cent of the capital.

Investment costs amount to LE607mn, with capital accounting for 49.4 per cent, loans 49.4 per cent, and sales down payments 1.2 per cent.

The construction process would span 45 months, to begin real production in 2000 with an annual productive capacity of 1.2 tons. It is envisaged that the project will play a pivotal role in gratifying the needs of Upper Egypt.

In fact, NBE's dedicated efforts are quite evident in its formidable participation in 105 projects with total value amounting to LE11.2bn of which NBE accounts for 1.3bn, thus pinpointing to the fact that NBE is treading all economic fields.

Investment conference in Moscow

MOHIEDDIN El-Gharib, minister of finance, and Ibrahim Fawzi, head of the executive board of the General Investment Organisation, inaugurated a conference in Moscow on investment in Egypt, focusing on new financial possibilities and ways to attract and increase foreign investment in Egypt. The conference was held as the result of an agreement with the commercial and economic relations minister in Moscow. In mid-October, an exhibition will be held featuring Egyptian goods that can be marketed in the former Soviet Union.

Ahmed Shiha, head of the Egyptian Assembly for Technological Marketing, said that the Russian market is considered one of the strongest markets

in the world, and has high purchasing power, operating under a free-market economy rather than under the sole authority of the government. Not wishing to ignore the potentiality of such a market, Egyptian exporters have long maintained strong ties with Russian commercial companies, many of which are headed and staffed by former employees of government-run companies, in order to continue and maintain the close cooperative bonds that now take place under the free-market economy currently prevailing in the country.

Shiha added that the Russian market is now considered to be one of the most promising marketplaces for Egyptian goods, with their high quality

and competitive prices, placing Russia on the map of Egyptian export countries. In cities such as Moscow, most imported goods from other countries tend to be overpriced and out of the price range of the average Russian. An excellent opportunity has therefore presented itself before Egyptian companies to reclaim the Russian market, using modern marketing techniques.



Ahmed Shiha



Mahmoud El-Arabi

Chamber of commerce promotions

MAHMOUD El-Arabi, head of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce, carried out the largest amount of promotions in the history of the chamber, raising 44 workers to different ranks. The promotions were made with the aim of encouraging increased efforts to develop the chamber in serving the commercial sector.

The promotions are part of a plan initiated by El-Arabi to further develop the executive body of the chamber in correspondence with the vital role it currently plays within Egypt's economic liberalisation policy.



Fathi Youssef

Delta Insurance to cover horse exhibition

AN AGREEMENT between Delta Insurance Co, headed by Fathi Youssef, and the organisers of the First International Arabian Horse Exhibition has been signed, by which the company will provide coverage for the exhibi-

tion, which will take place in September. In accordance with this agreement, the exhibition's organisers will promote insurance throughout all stables in Egypt, with the company offering the best prices and terms of cover-

age. This form of coverage which Delta Insurance Co is providing falls within the framework of its policy of providing unusual or specialised kinds of insurance within the market.

Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt			
Statement for the end of 1416AH (May 1995/May 1996)			
Results achieved (in LE mn)	End of 1416AH (18 May 1996)	End of 1415AH (29 May 1995)	Percentage of growth
Total balance	6424.8	6226.5	3.2
Customer deposits	5100.7	4933.3	3.4
Investment balance	5826.6	5665.3	2.8
Resources (ownership rights and reserves)	571.1	508.0	12.4
Total revenues	367.1	349.8	5.1
Net profits	287.2	245.9	16.8
Investment account dividends	275.5	245.9	12.0

With its major investment activities, Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt continues to play an active role in boosting a variety of vital sectors within the national economy. It provides financing to these sectors with the aim of providing all materials, equipment, buildings and land needed for the establishment of production projects. The number of financing operations which the bank provided for the year 1416AH (1996) reached 9432, with a total value of LE 3.3bn. Additionally, the bank has established and holds shares in 38 companies within vital economic sectors.

The number of the bank's reached 38 at the end of 1416AH, having capitals valued at LE409mn and \$294.5mn. Of these capitals, the bank has a share of LE 129mn and \$43.7mn.

The bank's zakat fund witnessed a major growth over the previous years, reaching LE5.3mn at the end of 1416AH. The balance of loans provided by this fund reached half a million LE at the end of 1416AH.

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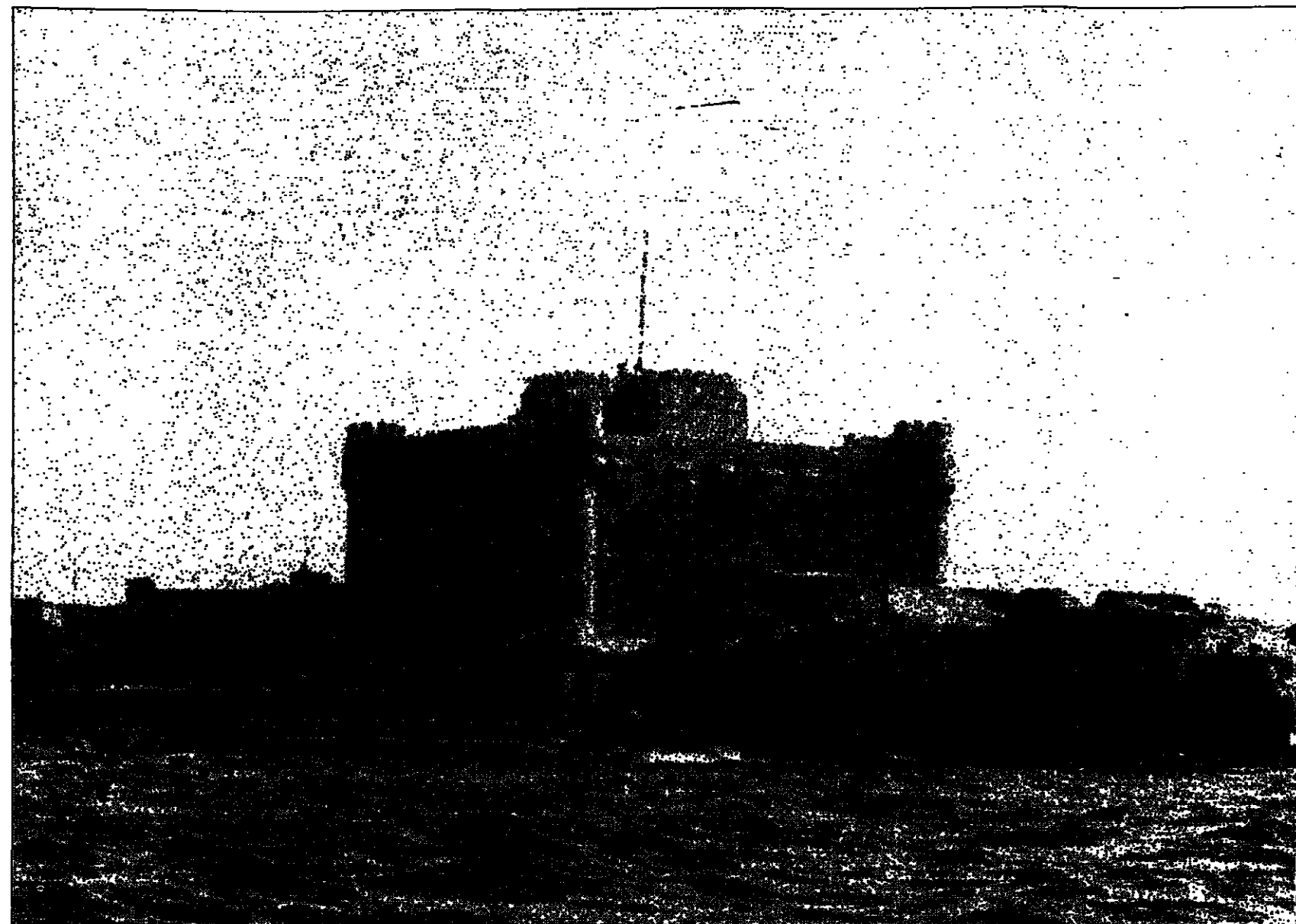
Qait Bey fortress will host the opera *Otello* for its debut in Alexandria

photo: Ahmed Mostafa

An Alexandrian stroll

From its development as a Greek port to a cosmopolitan city, Alexandria has had a long history. Today, it contains vestiges of every historical age, recount Dina Ezzat and Jessica Jones

Many travellers regard Alexandria as a summer retreat or weekend destination, but the coastal city is equally enjoyable for day trips. Visiting attractions from different historical eras is perhaps one of the best ways to experience the character of the city.

There are many ways to schedule a day's excursion because Alexandria is an amalgamation of centuries of art, culture and politics. One plan could include the Graeco-Roman Museum with its collection that hints at Alexandria's former ancient grandeur. Zani't El-Sit (the women's market), a unique feature of the city's shopping district, the Mameluke fortress of Qait Bey, one of the few Islamic monuments of Alexandria, as well as the old cafes and restaurants that recall the old cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Mediterranean harbour.

From its foundation by Alexander the Great in 331 BC to its capture by Octavian in 30 BC, Alexandria was the capital of a great empire and the intellectual and social centre of the Hellenic world. Later, during the first six centuries of Christianity, it was a venue of theological speculation about the nature of the universe and the relationship between God and man. After the Arab conquest in 641, the new rulers established a new capital in what later became Cairo, and Alexandria lost its importance. But the former Greek capital was never completely marginalised. In the first decades of the 19th century, Mohamed Ali revived the city by establishing the country's first modern navy there. In the latter half of the same century, Khedive Ismail turned the harbour into a cosmopolitan city.

El-Ramel Station at Saad Zaghloul Square is the city centre. Several tea-rooms and cafes cluster around the square facing the corniche. Visitors arriving in the early morning will find these cafes open and ready to serve freshly-baked croissants, tea and cappuccino. Built by European residents around the turn of the century, the cafes were not just social meeting places; they were also centres of political and literary activity. Octogenarian writers who have spent their lives working in the same establishments tell stories about the original owners, the good old days of Alexandria and the literary world frequented the now almost century-old coffeehouses and wrote about them.

The Graeco-Roman Museum on El-Horriya Street is within walking distance of El-Ramel Square. Founded in 1891, the museum first opened its doors with collections donated by individuals or transferred from the Antiquities Authorities in Cairo. A continually increasing interest in Graeco-Roman art and archaeology helped the museum grow and in 1893 the Alexandrian Archaeological Society was founded. Excavations also yielded many interesting pieces that found their way to the halls of the museum.

While the museum is naturally overwhelmed with Greek and Roman art, some Pharaonic and Christian items are also exhibited. The most noteworthy items range from the third century BC to the third century AD. An hour or two is sufficient to enjoy the marble objects, mosaics and jewellery. A little garden in the centre courtyard arranged with fragments of columns, sarcophagi and stone inscriptions is a pleasant resting place for those who wish to spend more time in the museum.

A number of colonial buildings and small shops that have resisted the encroachment of large department stores flank the small streets branching off Al-Horriya. A stroll through them on a sunny day offers a glimpse of Alexandria's character before the cultural changes of the 1930s stripped the city of its once famous cosmopolitan flavour. Gone are the days when women window-shopped before stores carefully displaying expensive European brands while groups of Italian, Greek and Egyptian shared their five o'clock tea at Trianon, Delice and Patisseries. Today, one is likely to catch sight of a more homogenous Egyptian group and the occasional tourist.

Again, within walking distance of the Graeco-Roman museum, the Elite Restaurant on Safiyah Zaghloul Street is one of the culinary landmarks of pre-revolution Alexandria. Its Greek proprietress still holds court at a table near the entrance so she can greet visitors and personally attend to her customers. Her cosy but sophisticated style is reflected in every aspect of the tavern-like haunt, made famous by such patrons as the English novelist Laurence Durrell, legendary Egyptian singer Um Kulthoum, and a bevy of Egyptian cinema stars. It is now favoured by the few remaining members of Alexandria's once-large Greek community and is a regular stop for foreign visitors.

Always a preferred lunch spot, Elite's kitchen features Greek-Egyptian specialties with an array of seafood dishes. The table setting is simple but the food is elegant and reasonably priced.

A walk through the narrow alley of Zani't El-Sit is a colourful encounter with the buttons, ribbons and toiletries that Alexandrian women are fond of. There, hopeful brides select pearl and gold beads for the embroidered panels of their wedding dresses. Other regular customers include housewives who haggle over the price of second-rate material for tablecloths and housecoats. Originally built as stables by the French during the Egyptian campaign at the turn of the 19th century, the stalls were later turned into stores operated by a Moroccan trader selling oil, soap and textiles.

Souk Libya, a group of stalls selling kitchen goods, is the street leading to the Zani't. Just outside the Zani't is the Souk El-Akkad (the Collar Souk), the market for silver jewellery and semi-precious stones. Parallel to the Zani't is Fransa Street, or the gold district.

Exploring each market takes time, at least an hour for interested shoppers who are likely to find intriguing bargains. The jewellery shops of Fransa Street offer items not likely to be found in Cairo's stores. The earrings and rings are more delicate and carefully crafted. Silver, on the other hand, is not as stylish as the modish bracelets and necklaces sold in Khan El-Khalili. Shoppers will find, however, that prices of mass-produced silver goods are better in Alexandria.

Many Alexandrians say that enjoying the view from the Qait Bey fortress is the best way to conclude a day in the city. Located on a promontory jutting out from the Corniche, this Islamic landmark was built by Sultan Ashraf Qait Bey in 1495 to face the Mediterranean Sea and the eastern harbor for defence purposes. Today, visitors flock to watch the Mediterranean sunset from Qait Bey's thick stone ramparts and enjoy the bird's-eye view of pastel-colored fishing boats docked in the harbour below.

It is easy to understand the nostalgia that keeps fans of Alexandria returning to the port city season after season.

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet
Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 3.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm, LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm, LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir square. Tickets LE36.

Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32.

Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service: 6.45am, from Ramsis Square in Alexandria, Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada
Services 8am and 3pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurgada noon and 3pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada
Service 6pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria, Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza, Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalati (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tugaid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai station at Abbassya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 9pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tugaid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.5; air-conditioned bus LE52.5, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tugaid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.5; air-conditioned bus LE52.5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tugaid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE57.5; air-conditioned bus LE52.5, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min, from 7am to 6.30pm, from Abbassya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus
Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurgada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quaser
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 3pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 375-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan
7.40pm and 9pm, from Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am. Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners, LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan
6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor, first class LE31; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Turkish" trains
YIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE33 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.

Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir, July 390-0909; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 759-9886. Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE300 for Egyptians, LE991 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE230 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada
Tickets LE238 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE240 for Egyptians, LE821 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels
Here's a look at the special rates most hotels, especially resorts, are offering to Egyptians and foreign residents.

Hurgada
Helwan Regina Hurgada. LE120 per person in a double room including breakfast, dinner buffets and taxes. Valid until the end of the summer season.

Sharm El-Sheikh
Sharm El-Sheikh Marriott. LE240 for a single or double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Sharm El-Sheikh Mövenpick Hotel.
LE200 for a single and LE250 for a double room in the front by the swimming pool. The hotel offers prices of LE160 for a single and LE200 for a double room in the back, or sports area. Prices include buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Travel agencies
Travel agencies are offering various packages both inside and outside Egypt this summer.

Flamingo Tours: A trip to Nice is LE2,850 for 8 days. Nice and London is LE3,490 for 15 days. Spain and Portugal is LE4,250 for 11 days. Athens and Rhodes is LE3,280 for 10 days. Paris and London is LE4,950 for 15 days. Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is \$3,335 for 19 days. Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from \$1,382 for 8 days.

Karnak Tours is organising trips to Marsa Matruh for 4 days in three star hotels on a half board basis at prices starting from LE295. The company is also offering trips to Istanbul for 8 days at prices starting from LE1,450.

Alexandria '96

As September approaches, preparations for the "World Festival of Alexandrias" are under way. Rehab Saad reviews the proceedings

Alexandria is preparing to receive guests for the Second World Festival of the Alexandrias, September 19-28, under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak. The festival will include folkloric dancing from each of the 22 participating namesakes, art exhibitions, fashion shows and most notably, a performance of the opera *Otello*, which will take place at Qait Bey fortress.

Roads are paved, electrical wiring is renewed, five-star hotels are prepared to receive dozens of participants and guests, and tourist programmes are scheduled to entertain the guests during their stay in Alexandria. Dozens of young people have volunteered to accompany the delegates, help clean the city and organise traffic during the event. Additionally, security measures are in place to help make the event successful.

"We have a reliable plan for transporting the delegates from the airports in Cairo or Alexandria to their hotels. And regarding the opera *Otello*, we will have special buses stationed all over Alexandria to transport the audience from their hotels to Qait Bey," said Zein Ebeidy, head of the higher committee of transportation and reception for the festival.

Ebeidy pointed out that Misa Travel, the transportation sponsor

for the festival, together with several private sector travel agencies, is listing the festival in their brochures as an option for tourists visiting Egypt. "The groups coming to Egypt, either to Cairo, Hurgada or Sharm El-Sheikh, can use the event to pay a visit to Alexandria as well. Moreover, EgyptAir will operate charter flights from the Egyptian tourist resorts to Alexandria for the performance of *Otello*, returning soon after the performance," Ebeidy told the Weekly.

He added that special sightseeing programmes are scheduled within Alexandria. "There are trips to the Graeco-Roman Museum, the amphitheatre, Pompeii's Pillar and the catacombs of Kom El-Shokafa. There are also programmes for trips outside Alexandria to Alamein, where the cemeteries of victims from the second world war can be seen, and Rosetta," he said.

Special hotel rates will be provided for guests during the event, "foreign guests will pay the same rates as Egyptians," said Dr Khalil Zaki, producer of the festival. According to Dr Mamdouh El-Beltagi, the minister of tourism, one night will cost \$100, including transportation inside Alexandria.

An art exhibition is intended to be one of the main attractions of the festival. "About 80 paintings, dat-

ing as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries, will be displayed in the Museum of Plastic Arts in Alexandria. Additionally, a Greek painter will come expressly to exhibit her work in the Shalalat Garden in the city centre," said Hazem Abu Shleib, head of the regional authority for the promotion of tourism in Alexandria.

"The festival will not concentrate its efforts exclusively on tourism," declared Ebeidy, "it will include an exhibition of Egyptian products as well. This is a good chance for our products to appear on international television, as reporters from all over the world will be covering the event," he said.

"The aim of the festival, which will cost about LE4 million, is to promote Alexandria as a tourist and cultural city," said Abu Shleib. He added that visitors will never forget the performance of *Otello* at Qait Bey, a fort similar to the one Verdi had in mind when he wrote the opera. "We have a large area in front of the fort, approximately 1,700 sq metres, which can seat up to 3,312 people."

Marketing the Alexandrias of the World is now the Ministry of Tourism's top priority. Recently the ministry issued two brochures detailing the event for world wide distribution.

Programme of the Alexandrias of the World

Thursday, 19 September

• Opening ceremony at Alexandria Stadium

Friday, 20 September

• International song festival at Alexandria Stadium

Saturday, 21 September

• Premiere of the opera *Otello* at Qait Bey

Sunday, 22 September

• *Otello* at Qait Bey

Monday, 23 September

• Viva Alexandria at Qait Bey, where the participating Alexandria cities will perform folkloric arts in their traditional dress.

Tuesday, 24 September

• *Otello* at Qait Bey

Wednesday, 25 September

• *Otello* at Qait Bey

Thursday, 26 September

• Viva Alexandria at Qait Bey

Friday, 27 September

• *Otello* at Qait Bey

Saturday, 28 September

• Closing ceremony, international fashion show, and gala dinner at Antoniadis Gardens

Fragile beaches

Striking the right balance between development and conservation was the theme of a recent public awareness campaign in Sharm El-Sheikh, reports Sherine Nasr

Environmentalists, biologists, diving instructors, beach combers and locals met recently for a week-long campaign in Sharm El-Sheikh to seek the best means to protect the flora and fauna of the Red Sea and the desert bordering it from the negative impact of human leisure activities. The project, entitled "Know Your Natural Heritage", focused on raising public awareness about how fragile marine and desert ecosystems are and how dangerous the impact of uncontrolled development can be.

"Egypt was not prepared for the rapid development that took place on some parts of the Red Sea coast. The result was uncalculated stress on the natural elements of the area, in the sea and on land," said Rolf Schmidt, a diving club owner.

Schmidt explained that a unique situation exists in the Red Sea since coral reefs grow parallel to a coastline on which a chain of hotels and tourist villages have been built. "Tourists cannot be exhorted not to step on the reefs a few metres away from their rooms because the hotel is already built on them," he said.

Schmidt suggested that not all of the Red Sea's coastline should be accessible to people. "Some parts of the coastline should be closed to human activities to preserve them," he said.

But construction along the Red Sea coastline continues at a fast rate, posing an ever increasing threat to the environment. Schmidt underlined a growing conflict be-

tween the desire to create more tourist resorts, on the one hand, and the need to protect the environment, on the other. "How far development should be stopped in favour of a healthier environment is a controversial question," he said.

Schmidt explained that activities such as diving, snorkelling and desert hiking indirectly affect many different creatures within a particular ecosystem. "Touching coral reefs, for example, destroys them and consequently leads to the destruction of fish that feed on them. So does uncontrolled professional and amateur fishing," he said.

While regular inspection of the way leisure activities are organised helps to slow down the pace of damage, educating locals, particularly the younger generations among them, is the best long-term way to protect the environment. "The best way to make the public understand is to teach them how fragile ecosystems are and how quickly they are affected by human activities," Schmidt commented.

Participants in the event heard lectures by experts on topics which included coral reef ecology, desert-sea interaction, tourist development and environmental planning. Field trips were also made to spots which had experienced serious environmental damage.

Fadel Abdel-Rehim, a hotel employee, felt that the field trips were the most effective part of the programme. "During four days we visited Na'ma Bay, Um

Seid and Ras Mohamed National Park and went into the desert to see what kinds of violation have occurred and how different sites are now from how they looked in videos that were produced a few years ago," he said. "We saw, for instance, the damage that was caused by a Land Rover that did not drive on the assigned track in Ras Mohamed National Park."

Professional divers made a survey of the different types of fish living in certain parts of Na'ma Bay and compared it with previous studies. They discovered that some species had disappeared while others were found that had not been sighted there before.

As part of the project, safari guides were taught how to minimise the harm their livelihood does to the environment. They were instructed on what food and what fuel left the least mess behind on safaris. "It became clear that any activity in the desert will remain for the next 20 years or so," said Mohamed Ali, another participant in the project. "We were taught that 'no' is the right answer to a tourist who asks to mount a sand dune, since this would destroy the creatures that live underneath. By the end of the event, I developed a sense of environmental awareness that did not exist before. Garbage in side streets, for example, was never so striking to my eyes as it is now."

The event, the first of its kind in Sharm El-Sheikh, was financed by the Canadian International Development Agency.

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office: 324836-324735

Alexandria Office: Ram: 483357-483778

Giza: 586461-586434

Airport Office: 4218464-4217886-4218237-4218199

Aswan Office: 315806/12/314

Airport Office: 498397-498568

Assiut Office: 323151-322711-324000-329407

Mansoura Office: 363978-363733

Hurgada Office: 442571/4

Airport Office: 442853-443597

Ismailia Office: 328937-321950-321951/2-328936

Luxor Office: 388580/1/2/3/4

Airport Office: 388567/8

Luxor Office Karnak: 382360

Marsa Matruh Office: 934398

Menoufia Office (Shebin El-Khayma): 233302-233523-233522

New Valley Office: 068/901695

Port Said Office: 224129-224276-224921

Port Said Office Karnak: 238833-239970

Sharm El-Sheikh Office: 608314-608489

Airport Office: 608488

Taba Office: 068/530610-530611

Direct: 5783628

Tanta Office: 311758/311780

Zakazik Office: 349829-349830/1

مكتبة من الأصل

Promises topped

Promises may be a dime a dozen, but when they are made by Egypt's athletes at the Paralympic Games, it's time to pull out your abacus. Abeer Anwar puts two and two together

The Egyptian Paralympic delegation more than made good on the promise they gave fans as they set out for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games. The athletes left for the US vowing to show the world that Egypt was a competitor to be reckoned with as they pledged to bring back no less than 25 medals. True to their word, by the closing of the Games last Sunday the athletes had collected 30 medals including 8 gold, 11 silver and 11 bronze.

The athletics team were the stars of the delegation, taking 22 of the 30 medals won by Egypt. Zakia Abdel-Rahman started the winning streak, setting a new record in the javelin with a 23.40m throw for the gold medal. Ahmed Khairy and Ahmed Antar, competing in the same event, won the silver and bronze in the javelin.

Not to be outdone, Ahmed Sediq captured the gold and set a new Olympic record in the 400m sprint after taking third in the 100m sprint for the bronze. "I am pleased that I was able to accomplish what I had promised in the 400m and I feel satisfied with my score," said an elated Sediq.

Egypt caused a sensation as for the first time in Paralympic history three athletes from the same country captured all the medals of an event.

Mervat El-Sayed, Zakia Abdel-Rahman and Sohair El-Komi were able to win the gold, silver and bronze respectively in the shot put event.

Egypt's unexpected achievement caused a quandary for the organising committee as they scrambled to find three Egyptian flags for the awards ceremony.

El-Komi herself caused a stir as she fainted for joy and spent the next four hours alternating between unconsciousness and hysterics.

Another world record fell as Ahmed Khairy defeated all-comers to win the gold medal in the discus with a 51.12m throw. Hani Eissa and Shaaban El-Khatib likewise scored silver and bronze medals in shot put events. A proud Mohamed Said Amin brought in the team's last medal with a bronze in the javelin.

Sprinter Ahmed Hassan raced away with the bronze medal in the 200m. Mohamed Abdel-Qader, continuing the trend of smashing records, set a new world record with his 50.66 shot put throw for the gold medal. Teammate Hani Eissa came up number two with the silver in the same event and Metwally Mathana won the silver medal in the 60kg weight category.

Weightlifter Ahmed Goma'a, gold medalist at the Barcelona Paralympics, elevated himself to victory, lifting a record 177.5kg for the gold. Fellow team member Mustafa Fadoun won the silver medal in the 82.5kg category with a 200kg lift and Enad El-Din Bahgat was able to collect the silver in the 67kg classification after lifting 187.5kg.

Bahgat tried his best to beat his Chinese competitor and his failure weighed heavily on him as he grudgingly admitted his rival's feat. "I couldn't lift anymore than that. This is an outstanding man," commented Bahgat.

Abdel-Monem Saleh, in his first international contest, was able to win the bronze medal in the 75kg category with a 197kg lift. Sherif El-Husseini collected two silver medals in as many days competing in the 100kg and over 100kg. In the same event, his teammate, Ahmed Antar, won the bronze medal to add to his gold in the shot put and the bronze in the javelin.

Essam Zeidan's silver medal win in the 50m backstroke saved the face of the swimming team by providing the squad's only medal. Although the 5-member swimming team weren't up to their best in Atlanta, they were Egypt's black horse in Barcelona '92. Dr Nabil Salem attributes the poor showing to the last-minute reclassification the organising committee had implemented.

At the closing of the Games, Egypt with her 30 medals was ranked 21st among the 127 countries participating.



Hossam El-Din Mohamed, Egypt's champion and bronze medalist, in training for the javelin competition

photo: Araf Saadeh

Cuesta for hire

The Egyptian Handball Federation has renewed team manager Javier Garcia Cuesta's contract for three more years. Inas Mazhar reports

The Egyptian national handball team displayed strong skills at the Olympics in Atlanta, improving the team's placing at the Games. Their success prompted handball officials in Egypt to renew the contract of the team's Spanish manager, Javier Garcia Cuesta, for three more years, culminating with the men's World Championship in Cairo in 1999. The team placed 11th at the previous Games in Barcelona '92, and under Cuesta's direction, increased their standing by five spots in this year's Olympics.

Cuesta, a former member of the Spanish national handball team, participated in the Munich '72 Games as an athlete. He then went on to coach three different teams representing three different continents in three Olympics Games: Los Angeles '84 with the US, Barcelona '92 with Spain, and Atlanta '96 with Egypt, making him the only handball player in history to participate in four Olympics.

After the contract was signed, Cuesta spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, evaluating the team's performance in the Olympics, and his future plans with the organisation.

"Because of the hopes and expectations we had prior to the Games, I have to say that I am a little disappointed that we did not reach the semi-finals and therefore lost the chance to win an Olympic medal. We knew it was not going to be an easy job. Team skill levels are very close in the Olympics and luck plays a big role in the outcome of a match. However, I am pleased with the team's overall performance and results," Cuesta said.

He explained that it is inaccurate to say that the team has not improved since the world championship in Iceland '95, where they came sixth place. "The team has improved significantly, and their skill level is always improving. You can't compare the Olympics to the world championships, because the Olympics are tougher and the teams are very close. Any team can win the Olympics if it is better than the others. The Egyptian team is more consistent now in the systems of the attack, and has more control in the game. The defence is stronger specially in the man to man play," he said.

He added that the team lost the opportunity to win in the match against Spain when they had it, but unfortunately they were not able to finish the job. "We cannot deny that the referees were not fair in the first half, but talking about the referees when you lose is a waste of time. But, yes, they were against us in the first half and everyone saw it, and in the second half we played very well for fifteen minutes and we tied five minutes before the end of the match, but then we lost all the attacks and were unable to win," he explained.

The 49-year-old Spaniard, however, was surprised upon hearing rumours and accusations that he deliberately failed to lead the Egyptian team to victory against his home country. "I am very surprised and sad to hear that for many reasons. It was very important to me to win this match against Spain. I am a professional coach and I am working with the Egyptian team and it is important to my career to win. If people knew my personnel situation, they would understand. I trained the national Spanish team for four years, and when the elections came in December '93, and new officials took over the responsibility of the new federation, they threw me out of my job and replaced me with another coach, and so I was very keen to win that particular match against Spain," Cuesta explained. "I coached Egypt in the Olympics and I really wanted to win and that is why I briefed my players on every single Spanish player. I was once their coach and I know them. Goalkeeper Ayman Salah performed the best in that match when he followed my instructions. But again, we lost because of the referees' bias," he said.

Years before the Olympics, the Egyptian federation promised its national team players it would allow them to play as professional players abroad after Atlanta '96. Now that the Olympics are over, the federation is ready to execute the decision, on condition that the players proffer any proposals they receive to the officials for study.

The team's manager, Cuesta refused to give any comments on the issue. He declared that it is important for the future of the national team, and until there is a final decision by the officials, he would not discuss the matter.

Meanwhile, Cuesta is preparing an evaluation report of the team's performance in Atlanta, and is developing a long-term plan for the team's preparations for the African Championship in Benin next October and the world Championship in Japan in 1997.

All in season

As the premier football league bounced into action for the new season, the week's results did little to shed light on the future. Eric Asomugha recaps the week's events

The national premier football league kicked off the 1996/97 season last week with a home game match between Aswan and Kroum. The season opener coincided with the first round of elections for the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) board. The elections, scheduled for each zone, will proceed in stages until the emergence of a new board in September. Unpredictable as the internal political games taking place at the Gabalaya Street address of the EFA are, they will surely be dwarfed by the rumblings on the field.

Playing the first match of the season, Aswan thrashed fellow debutants Kroum 4-1 in Aswan. In other home victories, Ismailia beat Al-Minutia 2-1, Itihad Alexandria defeated Qons 1-0, Mansura trounced Mariut 6-2, Ahly beat Arab Contractors 2-1 and Zamalek crushed Itihad Osman 3-1. Suez lost at home to Sbehin 1-0 and Masri drew 1-1 with

Basidiya El-Mehalla for the first draw of the season.

League champions Ahly, playing without their Ghanaian top goal scorer Ahmed Felix, were forced to wait till the 37th minute goal by Hossam Hassan in the second half to clinch a 2-1 win over Arab Contractors.

Ahly, in a lacklustre encounter, were lacking proper game formation and all their initial efforts for a goal were to no avail. In a brilliant move Walid Salah El-Din, who had been threatening the Contractors defences, was brought down in the box. Arab Contractors Hadi Kashaba neatly converted the penalty in the 51st minute for the first goal. The Contractors, playing in a defensive mode, with goalkeeper Ahmed Sahry making excellent saves, were forced out after the goal.

Mohamed Ouda, on the receiving end of a deflected kick equalised the match six minutes later.

Ahly's coach Reiner Hollman, in an attempt to break the stalemate brought in two substitutes. Hisham Hanafi came in for Hadi Kashaba and Yasser Rayan was replaced by former Arab Contractors Ahmed Nakhla.

Reduced to 10 men before the break Contractors' coach Michael Kruger stood motionless and seemed unsure if his team could hold on to a draw.

The Contractors defence remained hard to crack, but collapsed as Mohamed Youssef skillfully volleyed the ball to Hossam Hassan who headed it into the far left of the post for the winning goal in the 37th minute.

Itihad Osman, met one of the league giants in their first match as Zamalek took the game 3-1. Zamalek's unpredictable striker Ayman Mansur celebrated the new season with a hat-trick to score the

winning goal.

Zamalek with aggressive play took the lead in the 44th minute. Itihad Osman came back to equalise in the 5th minute of the second half as a one-man strike bounced into the net after glancing off defender Tarek Mustafa's body. Goalkeeper Hussein Sayed was hard pressed to save Zamalek from further damage.

Ayman Mansur wasted no time planting the 26th minute second goal. Holding the opponent to their own half, Zamalek took better control and coordinated their attack from behind. In the 34th minute, Ayman Mansur completed his hat-trick from Kasi Said Yusuf's cross. With time running out, Ayman Ragab squandered a penalty and lost the chance for Itihad Osman to reduce the gap.

At this early stage of the league, goal scoring plays a significant role as the points earned.



Egypt's champion, Ashraf Helmi, playing against Qatar's Gaber Affif in the team event. Egypt won 3-0, though Helmi was unable to make it to the singles' final



photo: Araf Saadeh

Gold off the table

Last week Egypt's table tennis teams trampled the competition underfoot at the 15th Arab Championship and the table's set for the taking of the singles' gold

The indoor halls of Cairo Stadium witnessed the honouring of all four Egyptian teams competing in the 15th Arab Championship. The Egyptian squads effortlessly swept the matches 3-0 to secure the gold medals in competitions pitting them against teams from 15 countries, Abeer Anwar reports.

Although Qatar and Bahrain early on in the championship turned the tables by surprisingly beating Tunis and the Emirates, the expected winners, Egypt managed to keep the upper hand.

In the women's team event, the squad smashed all opponents on

the way to the finals against Tunisia.

Tunisia's team had had great hopes of winning due to the absence of pregnant star player, Nihel Meshref, but Egypt trounced them 3-0. As a result, Egypt took first place, Algeria came in second after defeating Lebanon 3-0 and Tunisia consoling themselves with third place.

Egypt overcame Tunisia in the men's semi-final to meet Qatar in the final. The two teams vied to show each other up, but, in the end the Egyptian players experience and talent prevailed as Egypt's

champions headed Qatar a 3-0 defeat. Qatar was relegated to second and Tunisia third place after besting Saudi Arabia 3-0.

The girls under-17 team event, witnessed the Egyptian team brushing aside all-comers on the way to the finals to win 3-1 over Algeria. As a result, Algeria retreated to second place and Syria came third after beating Sudan 3-0.

In the boys under-17 team event Egypt met Syria in the final where Egypt bested the latter 3-1. Egypt came first, Syria second and Kuwait third.

In a surprising match at the men's singles quarter-finals, Ashraf Helmi, Egyptian and Arab champion for four consecutive years lost to Qatar's Hamad Al-Hamdi 2-3. Although Helmi bested Hamdi in his team's match 2-0, he was unable to repeat his success. Hamdi emboldened by cheering Qatar fans revenged his previous loss to Helmi. An over-confident Helmi was easily defeated by Hamdi. The difficult mission of taking out Hamdi is left to Sherif El-Sakati.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Alaa El-Dib: The word and the world

Banned, beleaguered and bewildered:
he is still fighting the octopus

Alaa El-Dib, like so many Egyptian intellectuals, is faced with a dilemma every day of his life: how is it possible to crystallise the search for the absolute, on one hand, and still remain alert to the most minute contradictions in Egyptian reality, on the other? Alaa El-Dib's has been a chequered career. In his youth, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood but soon recoiled from their policies towards women's education, attire and work. This disenchantment was intensified when he witnessed the virulent attack of one of the "brothers" on his sister's ambitions. He found his way to the periphery of a communist organisation, without however becoming a full member and applying the approved political line. He then joined the temporary "Liberation Organisation" which replaced the political parties under Nasser. He was later also a member of the secret Vanguard Organisation, established by the regime within its single ruling party, the Arab Socialist Union, but he was never really convinced of the usefulness of the whole endeavour.

El-Dib's passage through all these political parties and ideologies was as light as that of a feather borne by the breeze. But these apprenticeships afforded him sharpened awareness, a solid knowledge of different schools of thought, an ability to empathise with different kinds of people, and a healthy scepticism towards whole-hearted dedication to any political system. His esteem for certain leftists and their sacrifices aside, El-Dib watched left and right travesty the meaning of "revolution". The word ceased to signify freedom, clarity of purpose or promise of change, and he turned away in disappointment. Literature, then, appeared as the only means of escaping the absurdity and futility of political activism. Even in literature, however, his dreams remained imbued with a desire to change reality.

It is only natural, then, that fighting underdevelopment would be El-Dib's main human and artistic cause. Poverty, hardship, humiliation, oppression and distress are the tentacles of an octopus to be fought at home, at work, in the street: everywhere human beings love, live, accept and reject. The main weapon is an innocent dream of a better future and a sense that one belongs, emotionally, among others. Responsibility for changing the world: Alaa El-Dib carries the burden on his shoulders, and seeks to fulfil it in his work. But his back threatens to break against the stubborn rocks of events and the limitations of possibility. This sense of responsibility is transformed into a rebellion against the world one wanted to change; rebellion, in turn, becomes an intense sense of alienation. Where does it all lead? Should one be content with monitoring one's boredom, checking the feeble pulse of stagnation every now and then?

The committed, lonely, writer: El-Dib thinks of Sartre. He accepts those elements of existentialism that link the literary experience with philosophical thought, but he looks at them through an Arab prism.

The "crisis" which occupies centre-stage in his life manifests itself in continuous disruptions. He entered law school while it was undergoing a major transformation; that school which before 1952 was a breeding ground for politicians, leaders and rulers, became an incubator for petty lawyers and clerks after the revolution. The attack on

leading jurist Sanhouri Pasha in 1954, carried out with the regime's blessing, revealed the pit into which law and its custodians had sunk in the government's eyes.

El-Dib used to play truant from law school — not for walks along the Corniche, but to escape to the university's central library, attached to the Faculty of Arts. There, the crises of all political groups — right, left and centre — were intensely expressed. The old agonised, but its death rattle beralled no real death; the new, despite the volume of its rhetoric, was still weak. In between, the centre oscillated. It was a period of disruptions and breaks.

After graduation, El-Dib turned to journalism. It seemed to him a path that could bring together the strands of his literary and artistic interests with his dreams of social change. Then there was the advantage of a wide readership: after all, what is the use of writing for friends with whom he could converse every day?

For him, the gap separating the intellectual from the audience, like that separating him from political parties, could be bridged through effective journalism. Writing for a large audience requires compromise, but for him, clarity and simplicity were not to be sneered at. Clarity, however, was the least of his worries. He never foresaw that a certain shallowness, the repetition of platitudes, would be expected of him. The intellectual was required to echo public opinion as perceived by the regime.

Ideology and power: these are themes he runs up against every day, and they often feel like a brick wall. An intellectual of this stripe deals with conflicting convictions and values linked to specific social forces. Nor does he innocently believe that dominant ideas are neutral: the fact that they reflect material power is all too clear. El-Dib soon realised that the media, including the magazine he worked for, are not free-floating means of communication, nor open forums for debate. Repeatedly, his writings were officially banned, for reasons unknown to him. The brick wall leaves bruises.

In his autobiographical essays, *Awraq Mu-thaqaf Masri: Waqfa qabl El-Munhadar* ("An Egyptian Intellectual's Papers: Pause before a Precipice"), El-Dib remembers feeling like a servant kept inside the house by the master, for fear that he starve and cause problems. If he dares to persist and anger the master, he will be exiled — consigned to oblivion. El-Dib learned first-hand the limitations on freedom of the press; the contradiction between ideologies and interests, limitations and freedom that brought one specific term to the centre of his mind. Dialectics, a key-concept in El-Dib's mental luggage, repeated almost obsessively in his writings, also informs his understanding of events in his own life.

While El-Dib tenaciously pitted himself

against the prohibitions slammed on his work, he was often saddened to see the vibrant and dynamic ideas he had committed to paper still-born in print. Most painful of all was the way in which the very words by which he expressed his patriotism were used to charge him and ban his writings. The periods when the media was closed to him left him with a sense of insecurity and bewilderment — "And how many nights did I feel like an outcast, persona non grata". If a writer's country is the word, to be prevented from writing or to have one's words distorted is indeed a form of exile. The experience is particularly poignant in El-Dib's case: his words were never of the pre-packaged variety, interchangeable terms looked up in a lexicon, the traditional rhetorical baggage so familiar to Arab readers, but the result of perpetual dialogue with the potential and the limitations of reality, carried out by a sharp and questioning mind.

El-Dib's works were not banned in the '50s, when many of his colleagues were imprisoned and tortured. Never a victim of the regime's physical brutality, El-Dib deeply empathised with the plight of those journalists who were, and never participated in the smear campaigns launched against them by the authorities. His career in journalism began while he was still an undergraduate, and some of his literary translations, mostly of poems, were published in *Sabah El-Kheir* (his passion for poetry is always discernible in the rhythms of his prose). Since then, El-Dib has produced translations that reveal the breadth of his readings. His collection *Inna'a FYI-Thalathin* ("A Woman of Thirty") brought together a variegated selection of writers (Arthur Miller and Truman Capote, among others). Then came Beckett's *Endgame* ("Li'bat El-Nihaya"), translated when the playwright was just being discovered — and adulterated — by a wide audience in Egypt. El-Dib's decision to translate an absurdist play reveals his preoccupation with the contradictions of life and the need for new artistic techniques in art with which to grapple with these ironies. El-Dib also seems to have been aware of an oft-overlooked aspect of the theatre of the ab-

surd: the many techniques drawn from popular spectacles — music halls, jugglers and magicians, verbal nonsense and scenic effects. In his critical essays and creative writing, El-Dib would continue to draw on folk art for new sources of inspiration.

But to draw a portrait of El-Dib as an exclusively cerebral man would be misleading — he has often plunged into deeper, more dangerous waters. Intense emotion, the gap between desire and fulfillment, the difficulty of communicating with the other, and the havoc wrought by the pleasure principle: with his marriage in 1972, El-Dib entered a safer, gruelier haven.

The early '60s were the days of socialist slogans and alleged victories. El-Dib was a member of the Vanguard Organisation's branch at the publishing house where he worked, though circumstances never allowed him to obtain a membership card. The members of the organisation were given a say in the publishing house, but El-Dib never had that privilege. His 1964 collection *Al-Qahira* ("Cairo"), is a window into his state of mind at the time. Slogans and triumphal marches are conspicuous by their absence. The hero of the title story — in many ways an Egyptian version of *L'Étranger*'s Meursault — experiences deep loneliness and isolation, at work, in the family, in the street and even in the embrace of the prostitute with whom he lives. His total alienation leads to a sense of claustrophobia. His brother lies dying, his mistress is pregnant; impossibly watching his fate unravel, he finds himself committing a murder, although in this case the victim is not a "foreigner" but his own mistress. In court, he denies that he killed his mistress because she was a prostitute; nor was the stress caused by congested public transport the problem, nor yet his hatred of Cairo and its heat, nor the crisis of Left and Right, nor an existential crisis. Simply, he did not want his child to be born as he himself was responsible for nothing: he slavishly enacts a destiny preordained by the Lord, for he is a believer and a good citizen, innocent and scared and incapable even of conceiving of hope.

Ten years later, El-Dib's collection *Sabah El-Gomaa* ("Friday Morning") was pub-

lished. To some critics, this collection was a forerunner of the new wave in Egyptian fiction. El-Dib himself does not understand the classification of writers into generations separated by ten-year generation gaps. He rejects the label "a sixties writer", and sees his work as a consistent attempt to renew fiction and fulfil the new aesthetic demands brought about by each new global transformation.

In 1970, El-Dib was awarded a six-month translation scholarship in Hungary. There, he attuned himself to the fabric of daily life. He fell knee-deep in love; it coloured his vision of the people he met, the Danube, the trees, the old Hungarian poems, and the music of Bartok. He wandered down narrow alleys in small villages and lay down in a field off an agricultural road. In that distant socialist country, he pursued a truth — any unequivocal certitude he could clinch and put down on paper, but only found half-truths and fragments of words.

Back in Egypt, he got married and became a father. He obtained a contract for a job on a newspaper in the Gulf. In two months he had been dismissed "for security reasons": an Egyptian colleague had vouched to the authorities there, on his own initiative, that El-Dib was a communist. Brief though his sojourn in the Gulf was, the patterns of migration to petro-dollar countries occupy a significant place in his fiction as they do in the lives of many Egyptians. The insidious impact of these Gulf sojourns on Egyptians — echoed in the novels *Afyal Bila Dimou* ("Children Without Tears") and *Qamar Ala Mustangara* ("Moon on a Swamp"), among others — is explored from the vantage points of husband, wife and children. What made El-Dib's sixty-day sample of the experience so intense was his empathy with other Egyptians he met there — relatives, friends or strangers, intellectuals or labour-

ers. Hence the vividness of his literary tableaux of Egyptians who have lived in the Gulf, portraits rendered with psycho-

logical depth and a keen awareness of all the dilemmas and transformations involved.

But if there is one thread, one cardinal theme, that runs through El-Dib's creative writing and critical essays, it is, in his view, the question of expression in the lower middle-class: its potential, on one hand, its betrayal of society, on the other. He is himself a member of that class, poised between the lower depths and the upper-crust. Literature, particularly the novel, has consistently sought to represent the bourgeoisie's mores and ambitions, barely taking note of other forms of human life outside that class. The betrayal of society by bourgeois writers, he feels, lies in their disregard for the tremendous energy of the "ordinary people" who constitute the vast majority of humanity. Their linguistic and imaginative resources — access to language at its most raw, creativity of expression — remain untapped. It is such people, he says, who may find a way out of the current crisis. El-Dib does not feel that the word crisis overstates the case: a great part of the contemporary literary and artistic scene, he observes, is parasitic, rootless and marginal to the mainstream of life in Egypt. The sound and fury that pass as the work of some of the younger writers is ailing, diseased writing, without core. El-Dib knows that literature bears a responsibility towards society and language. To El-Dib, writer of the scenario of Shadi Abdel-Salam's landmark film *El-Momia* ("Night of Counting the Years"), it is the understanding of the relationship between the word and the world that distinguishes one writer from another — and not one generation from another. He sees no way out from the current impasse: only new techniques that fulfil the true function of art.

Profile by Ibrahim Fathi



Photo: Farouk Shaban

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